

HARD-WON WISDOM!

Day 24



“Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures.”

—PROVERBS 2:3-4 (NLT)

Reflect

We will never be able to make total sense of the pain and suffering we endure. But, somehow, we may find little bits of hard-won wisdom in the midst. These precious gems do not erase the pain or justify its presence. People have had many ways of describing these unlikely (unasked for) takeaways. Like Abraham Lincoln, who tried to make sense of the death of his son and live with courage in the light of what he knew. This kind of wisdom was the “delicate fruit of a lifetime of pain,”²⁷ his biographer noted. Sometimes we can only mine a couple of true things, and

²⁷ Joshua Wolf Shenk. *Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled his Greatness*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005.) 192.

the rest of it is still garbage. We get to choose if we sift through the garbage to find the gems. As Rabbi Steve Leder says, “If you’re going through hell, don’t come out empty handed.”²⁸

Respond

If you were to name a delicate fruit that you gleaned after a season of terrible, what would you say? What is the wisdom you have gained out of the terrible? Reminder: these “lessons” do not erase or justify what you went through. No need to play mathematician on this one.

Blessing for the life you didn’t choose

*Blessed are you when the shock subsides,
when vaguely, you see a line appear
that divides before and after.
You didn’t draw it,
and can barely even make it out,
But here you are,
forced into a story you wouldn’t write.*

*Blessed are you in the tender place
of awe and dread,
wondering how to be whole
when dreams have disappeared
and part of you with them,
where mastery, control, determination,
bootstrapping, and grit
are consigned to the realm of Before
(where most of the world lives),*

*in the dream promising infinite choices,
unlimited progress, best life now.*

*Blessed are we in the After zone,
loudly shouting:
Is there anybody here?
We hear the echo, the shuffle of feet,
the murmur of others
asking the same question,
together in knowledge
that we are beyond what we know.
May you see a glimmer of possibility
in this new constraint,
that small truths will be given back to
us.*

*We are held.
We are safe.
We are loved.
We are loved.
We are loved.²⁹*

²⁹ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. “For the Life You Didn’t Choose” in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 188-189.

²⁸ Steve Leder in “Don’t Come Out Empty Handed,” April 4, 2023 in *Happens*, presented and produced by Kate Bowler, podcast, 53:03, <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/dont-come-out-empty-handed/>.

EMBRACE WONDER!

Day 25



“What a wildly wonderful world, God! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side, made earth overflow with your wonderful creations.”

—PSALM 104:24 (THE MESSAGE)

Reflect

Adulthood has a way of robbing us of the feeling of wonder, doesn't it? Is there poetry in taxes? Is there amazement in doing the dishes? *Not really.* Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said that “Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement....Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.” I don't know how Rabbi Heschel had the energy to greet each new day with amazement. And yet, part of me thinks that would be *wonderful*—to be surprised by what the day holds or in awe of those around me. Perhaps we can start today. Look around you. What ordinary wonder have you missed?

Respond

Maybe we need a random list of things to wonder about. Like why does that cloud look like a dinosaur? Why do crickets chirp at night? What random things do you wonder about? Write them down as a reminder to wake-up each day looking for awe and wonder in the world around you.

Blessing to feel wonder again

*You stand, stone still,
at the edge of disheartenment.
You hold this heavy certainty:
nothing changes, nothing lasts.
You feel hollow.
And yet, this world is full.*

*Warm earth pushing up new seedlings,
unfathomable oceans
teeming with mystery,
and the miracle of your very body—
fragile as it may feel—
carries the possibility of creating something new.
We are all swimming in wonder.*

*So why can't we always feel it?
Your blood feels cold with each tiring loss.
Good things, beautiful loves,
fried from your fingers,
leaving them to feel empty now.
But still.*

*Even if, today, hope does not come,
may the lights at a neighbor's house
glow like a jack-o'-lantern.*

*May the sounds wafting through your window—
a barking dog, kids running amok,
the buzz of a television
rehearsing the day's calamities—
remind you that we persist somehow,
under a distant shadow,
But joyful anyway.*

*May the sun shine down
and touch you.
And may you bask in it,
feeling the low murmur of the ground
steady beneath your feet.
And as the earth makes turns creakily
toward night,
let the day fall in behind us.
"What next?" We will say to the night sky,
before we close the door
and consider its answer tomorrow.³⁰*

30 Kate Bowler. Adapted from "To Feel Wonder Again" in *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day: Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs, and In-Betweens*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2024). 25.

LET GO!

Day 26



“Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?”

—ISAIAH 43:18-19 (NRSVUE)

Reflect

There are some things that we can't let go of—like care-taking responsibilities, illness, or paying bills (wouldn't that be nice?). But there are some things we can work on letting go of—like past hurts or grudges or that one thing we said that one time but cannot forget. Bruno Lanteri, an early 19th century priest (who was possibly the kindest of his age), advises us to “turn the page and begin again.”³¹ Well doesn't that sound a little like grace! So maybe today is the day to take Lanteri's advice. Whatever it is we carry—from the heaviness of the things we cannot set down to all we could (but probably won't). In this way, I don't carve out those parts of my life—I simply turn the page and let the previous pages go.

31 Adapted from Fr. Timothy M. Gallagher, O.M.V. *Begin Again: The Life and Legacy of Bruno Lanteri*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013). xiii.

Respond

If you catch yourself going to the list of things your brain is scared to let go of—don't sweat it, you're just being human again. Thank your brain for reminding you of the old chapters and gently turn the page.

Blessing for when you need to hold on or let go

*Sometimes it feels like a better person
wouldn't be like this:*

*tethered to so many hopes,
and fears, and expectations.*

*Blessed are you, pulled between letting go—
sometimes needing to let go—
and needing to hold on.*

*Blessed are you, who yearn
for connection, for love, for touch.
You who hunger
for the beauty of life itself
and the people who fill it.*

Blessed are you, who can't yet say,

*"I'm letting it go,"
because it feels as if you'll wash
away into an ocean of nothingness.
May you cling to what feels good,
loosening your grip on the painful untruths:
like the one that says you're alone,
or unlovable,
or that desire is the enemy.*

*May you hunger for what is good,
and be filled.
There will be no easy math.
You will lose, and you will gain,
and almost none of it will make sense.*

*It will force your hands open.
In the ebb and flow of wins and losses,
may you notice the mystery of it all—
the stubbornness of flowers
and the need for endless small reminders
that the pain and comedy of it,
will point you back to love.³²*

³² Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Adapted from "For When You Need to Hold On or Let Go" in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 178-179.

WORRY!

Day 27



“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

—PHILIPPIANS 4:6 (NIV)

Reflect

Heart races. Palms get sweaty. The ever-familiar feeling of dread. What are your worry symptoms? I have never really understood why people tell you: “don’t worry” or “calm down.” Has it ever worked? I guess people love to get bossy when someone is up to their hairline in worry. But maybe there is a different way to respond to worry—a way that makes room for our greatest fears to live alongside our greatest loves. So the next time you feel worry rising in your chest or body or mind, start by naming what it is you’re worried about. What does it tell you about what you love? What you’re afraid to lose or live without?

Respond

Start a worry book (or note on your phone) and write down your worries once a week. Every once in a while, scroll through those worries and see what has changed or not changed. Tell God what you need help with on this list.

Blessing for having a beautiful, terrible day

*Blessed are we, the worried,
with eyes open to it all.
Blessed are we, the aware,
knowing that the only sane thing is
admit to the fear in our peripherals.*

*Blessed are we, the hopeful,
eyes searching for the horizon,
ready to meet the next miracle.
Yes, blessed are we, the grateful,
awake to this beautiful, terrible day.³³*

33 Kate Bowler. "For a Beautiful, Terrible Day" in *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day: Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs, and In-Betweens*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2024). XXVII.

CHANGE!

Day 28



“Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father’s house. Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord.”

—PSALM 45:10-11 (NIV)

Reflect

When did you realize that the family you grew up in was...different from other families? Maybe it was a worldview you were given. Or the rules you lived under. The dynamics between your parents or extended family or siblings might not look like that of your friends'. At some point, we may realize our family is odd. And simultaneously, so much of that strangeness is also familiar—it's what made you, you. How do we discover compassion for our families of origin though we might not fit in anymore? That is the ever-evolving question as we navigate growing and changing and loving, but never forgetting.

Respond

Take a blank sheet of paper, and turn it sideways (panoramic view). On the top left, write ‘sticky,’ and on the top right, write ‘stuck.’ The rest of the page is yours to fill, with words or drawings—no matter how rudimentary—to illustrate the you that is now. What small problems are sticky? What are the big problems in which you feel stuck? Talk to God about what little changes you are ready to make to get unstuck.

Blessing for when you feel stuck

*You may feel like you're cemented still.
Unable to see a way out.*

*Blessed are you who admit:
"I have no idea how I got here,
or how to escape this
but I am ready—
ready for more light, truth, grace."*

*May today's moments move you
to where love can reach you.
May a deep truth remind you
with each step.*

*May you grow where you are,
sending down roots into trusted truths,
to where love lives,
and beauty is wide awake.*

*Let your heart seek the one good step.
And then the next.
Movement.*

That is the way.³⁴

³⁴ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. "For When You Feel Stuck" in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 148-149.

SUNDAY, APRIL 6

*Oh lovey, life can be so
wonderfully weird.*

*Embrace the absurdity
and find the joy in the
ridiculous moments.*

*Rest in the delight
of the unexpected.*

Amen.

SHARE THE LOAD!

Day 29



“On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.”

—LUKE 5:17-19 (ESV)

Reflect

Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber describes how she understood the truth of our interdependence most fully when she began practicing the uncomfortable honesty demanded by Alcoholics Anonymous. “Recovery is hard to do on your own,” she observed. “You have to do it with a group of other people who are messed up in the same way but have found some light in their darkness.”³⁵ They nicknamed this

35 Nadia Bolz Weber in “The Insight of Outsiders,” February 6, 2018, in *Everything Happens*, presented and produced by Kate Bowler, podcast, 35:36, <https://katebowler.com/podcasts/nadia-bolz-weber-the-insight-of-outsiders-s1e1/>.

sort of community “The Rowing Club.” They were all in the same boat. And they would have to take turns pulling on the oar. At times, each person would have to be willing to be carried.

Respond

Some days we can be the one who gives, and other days we need to receive. Which is it for you today?

Blessing for friends who hold us up

You are called to love,
but people are inherently risky.
Telling your story, being known,
asking for help,
even voicing the same worry again
for fear it might sound cliché.
(Shouldn't you be over it already?)

*But something beautiful happens
when you're known.
You are become stronger somehow.*

*Think of the pillars holding up cathedrals.
Flying buttresses, designed to support
walls that might otherwise crumble.
They allow the structures to rise taller,
more intricate, adorned with ornaments,
or filled with stained glass
that scatters colorful light in every direction.*

*When you don't feel tall or strong,
may you find those who hold you up,
who remind you how loved you are.*

*Yes, you'll get back up again today.
You'll get those kids cereal,
help parents with an errand,
go to work or come up with something
better to do with retirement hours.*

*You will try again.
Because someone else's absurd faith in you
fortifies you.*

*So, blessed are the flying buttresses—
those who hold us up when
everything feels ready to fall apart.*

*They let us face the day,
not because we're doing it alone,
but precisely because we aren't.³⁶*

³⁶ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. “For Friends Who Hold Us Up” in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 60-61.

BELOVED!

Day 30



“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.”

—PSALM 139:14-15 (NIV)

Reflect

Aging, I think, is a grand lesson in realizing you are certain about less and less. Instead of more answers, I end up with more questions. God, why did you make mosquitoes? Mirror mirror on the wall, how did that happen? Why do the years seem short and the minutes long? When do I start taking my own good advice—sooner? When will I ever heal? But what is becoming clearer and clearer is God’s absurd, wonderful love. God’s face is turned toward me in particular—and to you in particular—with a tenderness that melts hearts. It is a love that never ceases. It isn’t tied to us having all the right answers or right behaviors or right life. It is just a love overflowing for us all.

Respond

Make a list of everyone you love today. Take time to write a few people on that list, and mail them a letter telling them how much you love them. It can never be too soon to remind your beloveds of your love, but it can be too late.

Blessing for feeling love

*It can take a while to see it,
clouded as these days often are
with a vague sense of unease,
a gradual dawning to the awareness
that what is needed most is love.*

*Love for the specific, particular person
you are right here, right now.
(And though it might feel vulnerable
to admit it,
aren't we all at the center
of our own stories?
As heroes, villains, winners, losers,
or whatever fits the plot of the day?)
Let the story rewind,
back to the beginning,
to the moment eyes first opened
and, newborn, you came into this world
wholly loved.*

*Loved not for anything you had done,
but simply because.
Even now, when the world feels blurry,
love remains.*

*And that is life itself.
May you be reminded again:
how the world spins, the winds change,
the oceans churn,
and not a single fact
tells a different story than this:
you are loved.³⁷*

³⁷ Kate Bowler. Adapted from "For Feelings God's Love" in *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day: Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs, and In-Betweens*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2024). 157.

COSTLY LOVE!

Day 31



“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 (NIV)

Reflect

The thing about love is the cost. I met someone really special over the pandemic who taught me about love's cost. She is a professor of nursing named Christie Watson, and she risked her life every single day during the height of illness for the sake of others. She wasn't planning on having her schedule upended, her courage tested, and a flurry of fears about bringing disease back into the home with her worried teenagers. Costly love goes beyond what we think we can afford. But it was the love between Christie and her patients that sustained her. Because that's the other thing about costly love—at its core is *love*. In it we see the reflection of God.

Respond

Where are you in the seasons of costly love—springtime (eager), summer (energized), fall (running on empty), or winter (you might need a rest)? Ask a friend to help you figure out how to balance the cost and the love.

Blessing for caregivers

*Bless you whose love is service,
whose every urge is to keep going,
and not to count the cost.*

*And yet blessed are you,
beginning to notice that you are
slowing down, inexplicably,
or just pausing, staring for no reason,
or starting something,
but then quickly turning to another demand.
You who realize that you are beginning
to lose the thread.*

*Blessed are you who say,
I really can't keep going like this,
at this pace, under this weight.*

*May there be steady hands
to sit you down
and keep you there long enough
for you to really feel what you feel,
and know what you know.*

*May there be wisdom
to trust that the community is
wide enough, kind enough,
effective enough to meet the needs
that are here—both yours and theirs.*

*May there be peace
that frees you to let your hands
lie gently open awhile,
the grace to just receive.*

*Seek the rest you need,
and a little bit more.
And breathe.³⁸*

³⁸ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Adapted from "For Caregivers" in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 96-97.

SAY YES!

Day 32



“You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

—PSALM 16:11(NIV)

Reflect

“Things happen when you leave the house.” That’s my friend Kelly Corrigan’s motto. Pain or chronic illness or caregiving or the loads of adulting we juggle might tempt us to keep our world small. To say ‘no’ to an opportunity or invitation or new friendship that comes our way. So if you are wondering if you should stay in bed or get outside, pick the latter. When we say ‘yes’ whatever the day holds, we might be surprised by what will meet us.

Respond

Take time today to reflect on your adventures and different seasons of your life. What is some of the hard-won wisdom you can find? If possible, get out of the house today and see what is waiting for you.

Blessing for finding your way as you go

*Blessed are you, imperfect, gorgeous you,
with nothing more than this moment's honesty,
offering what you have—your incomplete self,
your half-formed thoughts,
your unsteady hope.*

*May you release the “perfect plan”,
the comforting myth that everything works out.*

*Instead, may you find grace in trying—
knitting together days as they unravel,*

*stepping forward even when the path is unclear.
Blessed are you who ask for help—
not for certainty or fixes,
but steadiness to take the next step.
May your courage rise,
Fortifying you to try and try again.*

*Moving forward,
not because you know everything,
but from knowing that love
will carry you forward.*

*This life is uncertain,
but you are not alone in it.*

*May you find strength in the mystery,
and peace in the unfolding of today.³⁹*

³⁹ Kate Bowler. Adapted from “For Living Without Control” in *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day: Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs, and In-Betweens*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2024). 103.

LOVE UP CLOSE!

Day 33



“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.”

—ROMANS 15:7 (NIV)

Reflect

Loving someone from a distance is much easier than loving up close. When you get close up, you can see all of their bad opinions, all of their wrongness, all of their hard-to-ignore habits. Francis Collins, a world-renowned geneticist and physician, understands how difficult it is to love people who are so unlike us. He led the National Institutes of Health during the pandemic, which meant he endured and witnessed vitriol on all fronts. What we need, he said, is to get out of our silos and really listen to one another. And that means accepting that the other person might have something valuable to say (as hard as that is for us to admit). Perhaps we might not be as far off as we first imagined.

Respond

What might we reconsider? And what would it take? Maybe start by reading the ‘wrong’ news source and considering another’s point of view. Maybe learning something new about ourselves and “them.”

Blessing for loving someone when differences divide us

This is a hard one.
How do I begin to connect
with someone so different from me?
How do I bridge this gap?
It feels wrong, like the beliefs I abhor.

*Blessed are we who want included
in the wild and beautiful experiment
to find a common humanity.*

*Who desire to come into the gap
that separates human from human,
to love the stranger—
especially the one we really don't understand
and secretly want to set straight.*

*Blessed are those standing in the gap,
In what can't be understood.
To actively work on disproving
our own intuitions about another,
to begin to see what they see.*

*Blessed are we, swimming upstream
against the current of human frailty,
fears and emotions,
and willing to be wrong.*

*To reconsider.
And hold to our integrity
with kindness.
Desiring to map it out
and play the course,
instead of the one we made up.
And to discover that humility
is what makes change possible.*

*Grace is never neutral.
It works backwards and forwards in time,
conspiring to make wrong right.⁴⁰*

⁴⁰ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. "For Loving When Differences Divide Us" in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 166-167.

DO LESS!

Day 34



“Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

—LUKE 12:27 (ESV)

Reflect

In a culture of *more*, what if we try doing *less*? Do you feel your shoulders letting go a little when you read this? Me too. Sometimes we need to give ourselves permission to turn down the volume of our lives. To care *smaller*. Whenever I have big, unsolvable problems, it's especially hard to give myself permission to care about the small things instead. Most days, the really big concerns are too heavy to hold in these two human hands of mine and far too massive to solve on my own. Set it down, that's what I tell myself. And start to care smaller. You don't have to save the entire forest, but maybe try planting one tree. (House plants are fine. I can never keep mine alive.) Or you don't have to solve world hunger, but maybe feed one person you know who is in need. You don't have to save the entire ocean, remembering to take your reusable grocery bags to the store is hard enough. But also feel free to boast about that to friends because, hey. Trying is hard and three cheers for you for getting in the game.

Respond

What small thing do you want to give yourself permission to care about today?

Blessing for small steps when you feel overwhelmed

Life has unraveled.
All my plans, wrecked.
My hopes, impractical.
And it's daunting imagining
what comes next.

*The bills that need paying.
The texts that need responding to.
The loneliness that seeps in every night.
Blessed are you who need reminding that,
lots of things aren't tackle-able right now,
but there's something you might try instead.
Taking that tiny step that might
make today a smidgen lighter.
Maybe not easier or better—but lighter.*

*Being extra generous to a stranger
or hopping in bed a little earlier.*

*Asking a friend to grab coffee
or listening for the birds
instead of doom-scrolling.*

*Setting down our to-do lists
and picking up a paintbrush
for no reason at all except joy.
May we anchor ourselves to the now.
Not allowing our minds skip to what-ifs
or what-will-happen-whens.
Blessed are you trying to put aside
the “everything is possible” mentality.
You who know that sheer effort
will not put these pieces back together.*

*You who have lost perfection,
and found rest in “good enough” instead.
One small step,
one deep breath,
at a time.⁴¹*

41 Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. “For Small Steps When You Feel Overwhelmed” in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 16-17.

PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 13

*Alright, friends,
this is the week
we've been waiting for.*

*Hold onto your hats—
it's going to be a doozy.*

This will be the hardest part.

*In the end, we'll make
it to the good part,
and we'll get there together.*

Amen.

ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Day 35



“When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ‘As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.’”

—MATTHEW 26:1-2 (NIV)

Reflect

Jesus had said all the things he could to prepare his closest friends for the momentous events about to unfold. He was giving them all the information he could, but it was as if they couldn't take it in. As he spoke, the disciples were living a split-screen experience, in two timelines all at once: the now that was his real presence with them, and the unreality of the future when Jesus would be really gone. The disciples were living in a state of anticipatory grief. It's a form of shock to be there in that kind of grief, because it carries so many unanswerable questions. How much is this going to hurt? What will I do? Who will I be in the aftermath of what is coming toward us? And what will it all mean, considering that Jesus was supposed to be the answer to all our griefs, not the cause.

Respond

Holy Week compresses into just a few days all that human hearts can bear, and more. Are you able to let yourself begin this slow movement through loss and hope with Jesus and his friends?

Blessing for Palm Sunday

*Blessed are we, interrupted by eternity.
Our hearts are startled,
our hands unsure of what to hold,
our feet barely keeping pace.*

*Time slips from our grasp,
here is the rhythm of Palm Sunday:
One small donkey
carrying the weight of the world.*

*One with a face set like flint
moves not in the power of warhorses
but in the fragile, plodding toward redemption.*

*Blessed are we,
who feel the smallness of our steps
toward a great mystery:*

*where through suffering, healing comes;
where through shame, dignity is restored;
where the cross disarms the powers
and death is undone forever.*

*Blessed are we
joining this procession:
In hospitals, homes, grocery stores,
the quiet champions of ordinary grace.
May you find your work enfolded
in the great, humble movement of love.*

*And blessed are we,
waving palm branches and shouting our hoarse
hosannas:
“Hosanna! Save us!
Save this tender, broken world.”⁴²*

⁴² Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Adapted from “For Palm Sunday” in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 202-203.

RESET!

Day 36



“Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.’”

—JOHN 3:3-5 (NRSVUE)

Reflect

When my son turned two, I had just been diagnosed with cancer, and I thought that was the last birthday I would get to spend with him. So I decided to throw him an absolutely absurd farm party. So recently, when he turned nine, I decided to celebrate again with another huge farm themed birthday because I couldn’t believe that I was still here with him. I went all out. We couldn’t just sit on chairs, we had to sit on bales of hay. We couldn’t just have desserts, we had rice crispy cake that looked like—more hay. I invited anyone who I have ever known and so there were herds of children running around like wild things. At one point I looked around and I could see my kid delirious with joy, and he ran up to me and asked, “Is this the day that I’m born again?” I thought yes, that is exactly how I feel about

it. Being born again is like this reset button. God loves to make us new. We can be in the muck of all kinds of things—health, bad things we’ve done, bad things done to us, anything—and suddenly be free to start again. Or move on. Or feel the wild joy of zooming around hay bales for no reason except the calendar has declared that you are suddenly new.

Respond

Splash some water on your face or at least let some drops of water hit your palm. Remember today you can be born again—you can hit the reset button on at least one small thing. Maybe you need grace and forgiveness, maybe you need rest and to let go of perfection, maybe you need healing from all the wounds. Let the water refresh you and try again today (that is being human).

Blessing for a little boost in the morning

The hardest work is already done.
Resurrection has come, light covered everything—
the sleepy and the waking,
the trees that brush the windows.

It whispers, “Begin again.”
May you embrace the obstacle course ahead:
the tangled messes and hard conversations,
the kindness you muster when it’s too much,
the fight you picked because you could.

And when your best efforts unravel—

*when memory falters or irritations boil over—
may gratitude lift your eyes
and settle your soul.*

*Because this is where the work begins,
more love, more trust,
more faith in the unseen grace
that meets us anew each day.*

*And when you pause, may you know—
the sun has risen,
and so has Love,
carried in the shape of a cross,
proclaiming, “It is finished.”
May your day be blessed,
as you walk in the light
of what is already done.⁴³*

⁴³ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Adapted from “For Maundy Thursday” in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 48-49.

JOY!

Day 37



“But humans are born for trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.”

—JOB 5:7 (CSB)

Reflect

“Choose joy,” we’re told, and when I talk about this, that’s when I can feel my most terrifying smile start to form on my lips—the smile that says that this kind of advice is a misguided form of the com-modification of one of the most amazing things that can happen to us. But that’s the thing, because it happens...to us. We don’t get to will our way into all the positive feelings of this world. Joy comes to us, to be sure, and we drink it in because it is such a gift in the midst of lives that are truly hard. And that’s just true.

This is Holy Week, where we feel the tilt of the earth shift toward a spiritual night. Jesus is preparing for his great sacrifice. And if you are in the midst of suffering, this is the time to remember that God is with you in *this*. We feel the deep unfairness that life is hard. In fact, terrible sometimes. Maybe more than sometimes. These are things we hide from our kids. This is the truth we rise above for their sakes, in our actions that speak love and make good things happen even in the face of really hard things. And sometimes we even get to do that in a way powered by that other truest thing—joy, that does come. This week as we prepare for the deep night, we will see everything: pain, but even joy. Look for it. Wait for it. We can’t manufacture it, but we can trust it when it comes.

Respond

What would it look like to take a responsibility break? (Even if that's a 10 minute walk or just sitting down and looking out the window).

Blessing for when good news is hard to find

*Bless you, witnessing the crumbling world—
the disasters too fresh to mend,
the losses that will not be restored,
the cracks that will never be filled.*

*Blessed are we, searching for hope:
for peace breaking through like dawn,
for the hungry to be fed,
for pain to be relieved.*

*Blessed are we, who dare to dream:
parents might not fear for their children,
leaders might guard their people,*

*someday relief will come—
a world where death is swallowed whole
and tears dry forever.*

*Here, in this unfinishable life,
we bring our burdens (so heavy)
to hands strong enough to carry them.*

*Blessed are you, walking the path of courage:
finding improbable ways to love,
offering creative acts of mercy,
and practicing irreverent defiance of despair.*

*Blessed are you, who create
beauty in this world.
May you carry this quiet revolution into
a world aching for signs of hope.*

*Blessed are we, trusting that somehow,
even now, today could be a sign
of good things to come.⁴⁴*

⁴⁴ Kate Bowler. "For When Good News is Hard to Find" in *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day: Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs, and In-Betweens*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2024). 169.

BETRAYAL!

Day 38

Maundy Thursday



“But Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?’”

—LUKE 22:48 (NRSV)

Reflect

Judas had been with Jesus almost from the beginning. They had walked those dusty roads together, felt the press of crowds all needing help and healing, and that night they just finished supper together. Judas was a disciple of Jesus, who called him friend. There is no sharper sting than the hurt from a friend’s betrayal. And Judas had used that most human expression of intimacy, a kiss, to make sure the Roman soldiers knew Jesus was the one they should arrest. He did not resist, pausing only to express to Judas the painful truth. Jesus referred to himself as “The Son of Man,” the one about to give himself for all of humanity, and there is so much poignancy in this phrase. Jesus was one who knew human suffering from the inside out. The one who gave his disciples the new mandate that very night, to love one another like he loved them and showed them what that meant, by the intimate gesture of washing their feet. And he was the one betrayed by the intimate gesture of a kiss.

Respond

Pick one word that stands out to you in this reflection. Let it lead you, asking God what it means for you today.

Blessing for Maundy Thursday

Blessed are you, standing at night's edge,
the festival of grief and somehow triumph.
The end draws near,
and yet, something new is beginning.

*Grace doesn't add up
it sits with betrayers,
washes the feet of backstabbers,
breaks bread with the disloyal,
and shares a cup with double-dealers*

*Blessed are you when guarantees slip,
as love shows becomes costly,
asking for everything and promising nothing.*

*May you see beauty in this sacrifice,
love that begs us to keep loving,
even as hearts are broken.*

*Blessed are you, remembering,
when forgetting feels easier,
that in this undoing,
the world is being remade.⁴⁵*

45 Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Adapted from "For Maundy Thursday" in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 204-205.

DEATH!

Day 39

Good Friday



“He said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’ They cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.”

—JOHN 19:14B-18 (ESV)

Reflect

There is a solemnity that comes upon us in the face of death, any death. But this is different. Someone alive beyond all telling has died. His body is still. And now there are witnesses who confirm it. They were there with him during his life and his dying, and the strong were with him to the end. They did not turn away. And neither do we. With all that we are, all that we know, we come.

Respond

Solidarity in life and in death. That is the movement of God toward us in the life and death of Jesus. That we may be one with God. How do you approach this mystery? What words make sense to you?

Blessing for Good Friday

*Bless you, following where love has led—
to the foot of the cross,
to stand with Mary and John,
a mother and a close friend,
overwhelmed that it should come to this:
powerlessness and utter loss.*

*Bless you, witnessing how hope and healing,
laughter and feasting,
miracles and promises
have come to this:
untold suffering, a cruel death.
It is finished.*

*Blessed are you, as the darkness deepens,
and a figure moves cautiously,
hands reaching to ease His body down.*

*Blessed are you with the women,
spices and linens in hand,
doing what's possible with grief so large,
Laying Him in a tomb.*

*Blessed are you, in the shadow's power,
Roman soldiers sealing the entrance,
the finality pressing down.*

*And blessed are we,
who remain here in wonder,
in the heavy silence of death,
asking again:
"Is this how love wins?"⁴⁶*

⁴⁶ Kate Bowler. Adapted from "For a Good Friday" in *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day: Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs, and In-Betweens*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2024). 173.

SILENCE!

Day 40

Holy Saturday



“When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.”

—MATTHEW 27:57-61(NRSVUE)

Reflect

While sitting in the pew, my tiny human turns to me and says (not so quietly), “The pastor keeps saying we are here to hear from God, so then why do they keep talking?!” As the women sit opposite of the tomb, they feel the silence of God. Can you imagine how it must have felt to be in the presence of Jesus—to feel the tenderness, love, and healing spirit he brought to the world. And then to sit in shock at the absence of that spirit. This is the day we reflect what the world looks like if we had no God. We are allowed to say: our God died. We can even say: the utter absence of God is more real to me sometimes than God’s presence. We

never get to say these kinds of things out loud, but Holy Saturday shows us that we are still faithful. This Holy Saturday, take a moment to sit in silence. Because the good news is that God came back to those very women, the very next day. But if you have ever felt God's absence, today's silence is your truth.

Respond

Sit in silence for 5 minutes. Listen.

Blessing for when you are too tired to cry

*Blessed are you, who feel undone,
too tired even for tears,
longing to be spoken back into being.*

*Blessed are you, who ache to remember
the bonds of love that formed you,
that hold you still, even now.*

*May they be as iron
that strengthen your soul.*

*Blessed are you,
who glimpse, however faintly,
that this present darkness
is not all there is.*

*And blessed are we who dare to say:
I am known.
I am loved.
I can love again.
Even—especially—here,
in this very moment.⁴⁷*

⁴⁷ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Adapted from "For When You're Too Tired To Cry" in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 34-35.

RESURRECTION!

Easter Sunday



*“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week
...Jesus came and stood among them and said to them,
Peace be with you.”*

—JOHN 20:19 (ESV)

Reflect

“Every time we both keep living, there’s a kind of glorious surprise.” That’s what I said to my friend and colleague Richard Hays, and for me the sentence sums up the intensity of hope—its sweetness and its pain. We were talking about the early Easter morning sunrise service, held outdoors. Both of us remember this moment vividly, because at the time we were both deep into cancer treatments. Richard was preaching about the resurrection, when Jesus rose from the dead, and just at that moment, the sunrise behind him spilled over the rooftop, and there it was. The glorious surprise. The moment we are grateful for another day of being alive when we both knew there was an alternative. We’re just mortal human beings, but there’s a truth we both hold, and as Richard said later, the truth we hold is

this: “The mystery of our faith, that life conquers death.” And as he spoke, both of us got a little misty-eyed.

Respond

Easter eggs, baby chicks, babies, bunnies, warm fresh yeast bread or spring flowers—all these speak of life springing up anew. Pick the Easter symbol that speaks the most to you of the aroma, the color, the shape of life conquering death. Savor it, enjoy it today.

Blessing for Easter Sunday

*Bless you, stretching out your hands
in the early Easter darkness,
weak and tired, longing to be lifted,
to stand again on trembling feet.*

*Blessed are you, who remember her—
the woman who walked to the tomb,
to do what could still be done
though all hope seemed drained away.*

*Blessed are you, who carry her story:
the two bright angels, the impossible news,
the Christ, alive beyond belief.
Blessed are we, stretching out our hands
in doubt and grief,
in sickness of body, mind, or spirit,
our prayers unfinished,
and yet rejoicing . . . anyway.*

*This is what makes us Easter people:
carrying the hope of the Resurrected One,
singing alleluias great and small,
while it is still dark.*

*Christ Has Died. Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.⁴⁸*

⁴⁸ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Adapted from “For Easter Sunday” in *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days*. (New York: Convergent Books, 2023). 210-211.



What does it mean to die, in a society that insists everything happens for a reason?

hard-won observations on dying and the ways it has *taught me to live*.

learn more here



Everything Happens is a podcast for people who know that life is, well, *complicated*.

This season we're on a quest for more —more wisdom, more connection, more hope. And I'm bringing some brilliant minds along for the ride.

join us here!





*peace be
with you.*

THE EVERYTHING
HAPPENS PROJECT