

ST. ALBAN'S AT HOME



*Prayers and
Meditations
for Lent 2022*

WRITTEN BY MARJORIE MENAUL

INTRODUCTION FROM MOTHER MARJORIE

Each day within Lent (including Sundays, which aren't actually part of Lent), this booklet will offer suggestions for thought, prayer, reflection, and/or action. The pre-Easter season of turning back to God can include sorrow and joy, solemnity and delight. May each of us experience these things as the loving God chooses.

Daily suggestions here come from a variety of sources – from the calendar of our church; from Lent Madness, a website with saints competing in brackets for the year's Golden Halo; from general calendars and seasons; from the Bible; from suggestions by members of St. Alban's; from the joys and suffering of human life; from the CAC (Center for Action and Contemplation) website, where Fr. Richard Rohr offers powerful daily meditations and podcasts. Simply subscribing to those meditations could provide a wonderful path through Lent.

Not every entry will speak to every person, of course, and something written for one day in Lent might make more sense to you on a different day. Use it as it is helpful, and let the rest go, trusting in God to be with you whatever you choose.

You might want to keep a written journal through Lent, recording reflections you find helpful. There is space at the end of some days' entries and at the end of this booklet for your thoughts, prayers, hopes, artwork . . . as you see fit.

-Marjorie Menaul

MARCH 2 - ASH WEDNESDAY



“Remember that you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

So we hear as our foreheads are marked with ashes on this holy day. Genesis 2 tells us that “God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” It is out of dust that God has brought us into life, and our bodies will return to dust when we die.

Dust is a dry, lifeless, discouraging thing. Many parts of the earth currently suffer from extreme drought, and in their fields, only dust remains; people (especially children) starve. Nations now experiencing the most extreme drought include Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, Iran, Somalia, Uganda, and Morocco. Fires burn around the world, turning forests to dust. In California and the American South, in India, across subSaharan Africa, in northern South America, the destruction is enormous, with smoke and dust swirling in the air.

It is not only the earth and our bodies that are dust - after a long period of COVID-19 illnesses and restrictions, many minds and souls also feel parched and dry. As we seek God in this holy season, may God draw us out of the dust into new life in Christ.

PRAY

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of God. Pray that we may find and be found by God.

Adapted from Prayers of the People, Form II, BCP page 386

MARCH 3

“Good King Wenceslas looked out
on the feast of Stephen.”

Today’s Lent Madness bracket pits Wenceslas against Stephen in the race for this year’s Golden Halo – you can vote for your favorite on that website. The story of Stephen, an early martyr for his faith, is found in Acts 6-7. Stephen is remembered as the first deacon, and spoke with power and wisdom. Because he preached about Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises, he was condemned and stoned to death.

The legend of Wenceslas, a 13-14th century Bavarian duke (not king), speaks of his caring for the poor. Loved by his people, he was not a favorite of his nobles. Wenceslas was declared a saint and martyr soon after his death by assassination in 935.

Whom do you know or know about who has stood fast in faith even at great cost? Name several people, and include them in your prayer as you pray today.

PRAY

O God, the King of saints, we praise and glorify your holy Name for all your servants who have finished their course in your faith and fear: for the blessed Virgin Mary; for the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs; for _____; and for all your other righteous servants, known to us and unknown; and we pray that, encouraged by their prayers and strengthened by their fellowship, we also may be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (from page 504 in the BCP)

MARCH 4- PAUL CUFFEE

On the Episcopal calendar of saints, today is the feast day of Paul Cuffee, a member of the Shinnecock Tribe. An ordained Presbyterian minister, he was a preacher and missionary to native communities, and worked for the survival of native tribes. His work built bridges between the Christian faith and native beliefs, and he is mentioned in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Uncomfortable though it can be to live among practices and customs different from those we are accustomed to, the Holy Spirit is always blowing among us like a fresh breeze chasing away the cobwebs. As our world changes, what new expressions of Christian faith do you see in today's new cultural situations? You may love them or find them profoundly uncomfortable, but what do you see?

WONDER

Which of these new things might challenge and deepen your life of faith?

MARCH 5- NATIONAL DAY OF UNPLUGGING

"For God alone my soul in silence waits; from God comes my salvation"- Psalm 62:1

Whatever the source of the designation of March 5 as Day of Unplugging, it is a helpful reminder of how much of contemporary life depends on electronic communication and entertainment. What would it be like to spend one entire 24-hour day fasting from those things? What would it be like to let silence into our lives, to fast from the noise and voices that drown out our awareness of the presence of God – TV, email, websites, phones, texts . . . ?

Waiting for God in silence might seem like a waste of time, something to be avoided, but it is much more. Silent waiting takes practice, but practice begins with a first try. Set aside some time today (Ten minutes? Twenty? Even five?) to wait for God in silence. If your busy mind won't stop reminding you of useful things you could be doing, keep pencil and paper nearby so you can write them down, then let them go and reclaim your silence. At the end of your period of silence, record (not electronically) what the experience was like, what (if anything) you have learned, and how you might seek to make a larger place for holy silence in your life.

Will you try it this Lent?

MARCH 6- THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

William Mayo & Charles Menninger

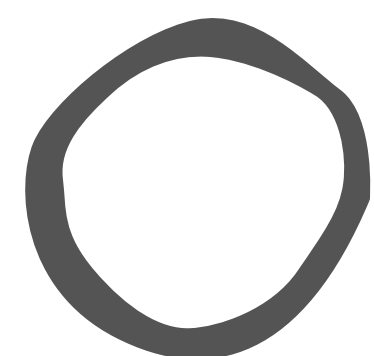
On this date, if it were not Sunday (always a celebration of the resurrection, even within Lent), the Episcopal Church would remember William Mayo and Charles Menninger. With his sons, the Episcopalian Mayo built the first general hospital in Minnesota. In time of disaster, they joined with Roman Catholics in providing care for the whole person, spiritually as well as physically.

With his sons, Charles Menninger established a new kind of psychiatric treatment facility, advocating for better and more humane treatment of the mentally ill.

PRAY

Pray today for all who suffer in body, mind, and spirit. Give thanks for those who care for them, and for all whose work draws us toward a society of wholeness and health.

In what ways do you see yourself as less than whole? How might you grow toward wholeness in this season?



MARCH 7

Today's Lent Madness bracket pits Saint Melanie against Saint Hilary. Melanie the Younger was a very rich woman of the 5th century who devoted much of her wealth to the church and to the poor. Saint Hilary of Poitiers was a 4th century bishop and theologian who battled strenuously against Arianism, the belief (eventually rejected by the church) that Christ was a creature and not God.

Give thanks for all who devote their resources to the welfare of others and the work of the church. Pray that God will open our eyes to the life giving truth of our faith.

As you reflect on your own faith, what do you see as the most important things you believe about God? If you had to sum up the core of your faith in a brief paragraph, what would you say? Let go of what you think you are "supposed to" believe and begin with what you have the most confidence in. Write about this in today, and keep thinking about it as the season continues.

What I believe about God begins with:

MARCH 8- INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

*Empowered
Women
Empower
Women*

The theme of this year's Women's Day is "break the bias," referring to a prejudice that still favors men over women in many places and situations. Some of us have felt the harm inflicted on us by this and other biases and have spoken out on behalf of ourselves and others like us. That is important, but for Christians, recognizing and addressing our own biases is even more important than challenging the biases of others. A CAC meditation speaks of human bias in this way:

"When I don't have intense and sustained personal contact with 'the other,' my prejudices and false assumptions go unchallenged. Think of the child who is told by people he trusts that people of another race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, [sex], or class are dirty and dangerous. You can immediately see the self-reinforcing cycle: those people are dirty or dangerous, which means I will never have sustained and respectful interactive content with them, so I will distrust or avoid them, which means I will never discover" otherwise.

MARCH 8- INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Like it or not, each of us has many biases: educated people deserve respect, but unwashed people don't; rich people are selfish; homeless people are irresponsible; the other political party operates in bad faith; people who own guns are (fill in the blank) while those who want gun control are (fill in the opposite).

Whether you were raised with them or have grown into them on your own, what biases do you recognize in yourself? Write them down and pray about them, not overlooking biases that prevent you from having "sustained and respectful interactive contact" with others.

PRAY

Pray for the grace to see each person as God sees them, and to live with respect for "the dignity of every human being."





MARCH 9

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."- Isaiah 43:1

National Celebrate your Name Week brings with it reminders of the many connections each of us has with the people from whom our names come.

Where did your name come from?

Your given name(s)?

Your family name?

Your nicknames at various periods of your life?

What has it meant to you to be called by these names?

To whom does your name make you feel connected?

God calls us each by name, Isaiah has written. None of us is just another number; each is known and claimed by God as the particular person we are. We are reminded of this at each baptism when the celebrant says, "NAME, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever."

God calls you by name. You belong to God.

MARCH 10

With many other Jews, Jesus agreed that this is the first step in living as the people of God: love God; love your neighbor. Recent interpretation sometimes takes this in a new direction, stressing the idea that each person must love self before being able to love other people. That is not what Jewish tradition or Jesus meant, however. “Loving ourselves” means treating ourselves as we think right, and “loving our neighbor” means treating other people with similar degrees of care and justice. Self-love doesn’t come before love of others. They can . . . they should . . . grow together.

If I care for myself by taking care to eat healthy food, for example, loving my neighbor will mean also making an effort to see that my neighbor has access to healthy food. (Who is my neighbor? See March 13 for Jesus’ answer to that question.) If I care for myself by choosing a home in a safe neighborhood, loving my neighbor will mean doing my best to make sure that other people are able to choose and afford to live in safe areas.

Another reflection for our journaling: What do you do to care for yourself – not just things you think of as self-care, but things you assume anybody would want to do for him/herself? What could you do to see that those same kinds of self-care are possible for other people? What will you do?

For self:

For neighbors:

MARCH 11 -NATIONAL WORSHIP OF TOOLS DAY

According to the dictionary, “Worship” can mean “reverence offered to God,” but it can also mean “extravagant respect or devotion to an object of esteem.” Either way, today’s observance sounds like idolatry, doesn’t it – worshipping your tools? Proper care of tools makes sense, but this may go a bit too far. And so do many of other expressions of extravagant respect or devotion in our lives.

Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-38) (For Jesus’ teaching on neighbor, see March 13.)

If worship of God is comes first, then probably worship of our neighbor comes second – “extravagant respect or devotion” to other people. Not just spouse or children or extended family, but “neighbor” – even someone you’ve always scorned or disapproved of. That person is not a tool in our own spiritual life, but a beloved child of God, made in God’s own image.

How do you worship God and neighbor?

What new way of worship might you explore?



MARCH 12- GREGORY THE GREAT

Daylight Saving Time begins tonight.

Set your clocks forward one hour before you go to sleep tonight! And be thankful – not too long ago, Daylight Saving Day often fell on Easter Eve, causing difficulties for Easter Vigil and Easter Sunrise services. Nevermore!

The idea of resetting clocks during the summer was first facetiously suggested by Benjamin Franklin, who argued that it would cut the need for candles. The idea grew, and DST was first adopted by Germany early in the 20th century. In the US, each state has had the choice of whether to stay on Standard Time or to change to Daylight Saving Time, with only Hawaii and Arizona choosing ST. (Within Arizona, however, the Navajo Nation does follow DST.)

From Ecclesiastes, chapter 3:

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

- a time to be born, and a time to die;
- a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted...
- a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- a time to weep, and a time to laugh...
- a time to seek, and a time to lose;
- a time to keep, and a time to throw away...
- a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

What time is it in your life?

What are you saving your time for?

MARCH 13- THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

National Good Samaritan Day

The story of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:29-37, is told by Jesus to a lawyer seeking to be told he is righteous. The lawyer agrees with Jesus about the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself,” but asks Jesus to tell him exactly who that “neighbor” is. He seems to be looking for an “out” – anyone who doesn’t count as a neighbor doesn’t deserve help.

Paraphrased in today’s terms, Jesus then tells the story of an undocumented immigrant travelling in a remote area who is carjacked, severely beaten, and dumped by the roadside. A faithful Episcopalian passes by, ignoring the wounded man. Later, a medical professional does the same. Then an Islamic extremist comes near, sees the man, cares for his wounds, takes him to a safe place and pays for his care. “Which of them acted as a neighbor to the wounded man?” asks Jesus. “The one who helped him,” says the other. “Go and do likewise,” says Jesus.

The neighbor is not someone who lives nearby or looks like a member of the same group. The neighbor is someone who acts to help a person in need.

“Beauty is as beauty does.”

Neighbor is as neighbor does.

And how do you do? How will you do?

MARCH 14 - NATIONAL NAPPING DAY

If you've ever gone on a retreat at a convent or monastery, you've probably been encouraged to sleep whenever sleep catches up with you – to take naps as they come. And often, they do.

Research suggests that short naps – 15 to 30 minutes, or even an hour – do a great deal to restore alertness. They improve creativity by allowing new associations to form. They restore the sensitivity of the senses, boost memory and mood, strengthen the immune system, and reduce stress. All in all, a nap can function as a reset for body, mind, and soul. And a reset is what Lent is meant to be – a reset of relationships with God that have grown careless or mechanical. A reset of bodies caught up in the stresses of life, unseeing, unhearing, uncreative. The prelude to a reawakening to God and to ourselves.

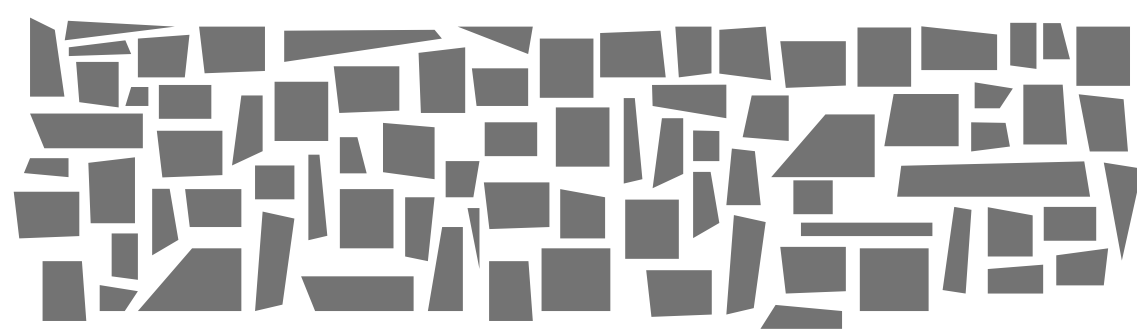
So go ahead and take a nap, today or any other day! It is not by our ceaseless striving that we work our way into life with God, but by opening ourselves to the love and peace that never abandons us. Relax a little! Then let yourself reawaken to the beauty and joy of life in God.

MARCH 15

International Day Against Police Brutality

In April, St. Alban's Caring & Sharing partner will be BREAD ('Building Responsibility, Equality and Dignity'), an association of Columbus religious communities working together to pursue justice. Each year, BREAD chooses one issue as focus, does research on that issue, and advocates with government for actions and policies shown to favor positive change. Efforts on each focus continue until the problem has been addressed.

In recent years, focal issues have included gun violence, environmental justice, and affordable housing. Police reform is another of BREAD's concerns because of huge disparities between the ways white and Black communities are treated. A Tufts University study shows that in white areas, police act as responsible and helpful service providers, and are seen as partners. In Black neighborhoods studied, police focus on aggressive intervention in violence and are often not trusted.



MARCH 15

Black residents are 29% of the Columbus population, but:

- Black people accounted for about 50% of the city's use of force incidents between 2013 and 2019.
- Over 2/3 of people killed by Columbus police officers were Black.

BREAD does not advocate de-funding the police, but (1) using restorative practices to establish trust between police and their communities; (2) using unarmed, trained personnel to respond to non-emergencies such as mental health and traffic stops; and (4) empowering a Civilian Review Board to oversee police.

PRAY

Pray for our police, for those suffering the effects of crime, and for those who engage in criminal actions. May God guide each of them into paths of righteousness, justice, and hope.

MARCH 16- FREEDOM OF INFORMATION DAY

In the United States, the Freedom of Information Act provides a pathway to information held by our government. The first amendment to the Constitution provides for freedom of speech and a free press. Our democracy relies on the free flow of information and opinion, although misinformation and disinformation have muddied the waters quite a lot.

The Church of England was born in part from a desire for the freedom of Christians in Britain to participate more fully in the life and worship of the church. Until the invention of the printing press, books had been scarce and expensive. Bits and pieces of the liturgy of the church were found in Latin in a variety of written sources, to which most lay people had no access (Few understood Latin anyway, except to utter memorized responses in worship). With the publication of the first Book of Common Prayer in English in 1549, all the elements of the church's worship were brought together into one book. At its beginning, our church was a revolution in freedom of information. As the world changes, churches descended from the Church of England continue to develop new BCPs so that new generations can worship together in the language of their time.

Each May 31, The Episcopal Church commemorates the First Book of Common Prayer with this prayer:

Almighty and everliving God, whose servant Thomas Cranmer, with others, restored the language of the people in the prayers of your Church: Make us always thankful for this heritage, and help us so to pray in the Spirit and with the understanding, that we may worthily magnify your Holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MARCH 17

*In one of his meditations on the CAC site,
Father Richard Rohr writes:*

“The big and hidden secret is this: an infinite God seeks and desires intimacy with the human soul. Once we experience such intimacy, only the intimate language of lovers describes what is going on for us: mystery, tenderness, singularity, specialness, nakedness, risk, ecstasy, incessant longing, and also, of course, suffering.

“Our biggest secrets and desires are often revealed to others, and even discovered by ourselves, in the presence of sorrow, failure, or need – when we are very vulnerable, and when we feel entirely safe in the arms of love. When that happens, there is always a broadening of being on both sides. We are larger people afterwards.

“And it is only when we are in such a tender place that God can safely reveal the ‘inside’ of God to us. All self-sufficient people remain outsiders to the mystery of divine love because they will always misuse it. ‘Fullness’ in a person cannot permit love because it leaves no openings, offers no handles, no give and take, nor is there any deep hunger. Human vulnerability gives the soul an immense head start on its travels.”

This season can be a time of living in the tender place Rohr has described. It can also be a time of spiritual strength-building (of character, of discipline, of charitable giving, of working for justice, of physical health). Both of these are important to us as faithful children of God. How have these two aspects been balanced in your life so far? In your Lent this year? Where is the Spirit leading you now?

MARCH 18- GLOBAL RECYCLING DAY

In a recent year, it is reported that the richest 20% of the world's people consumed 86% of the world's resources, while the poorest 20% consumed only 1.3%. Some of what we consume is needed to sustain our lives, food and water being most basic. Beyond those things, we Americans often buy things we don't need at all, to update our wardrobes, electronics, cars, homes on a regular basis. In one way or another, probably we all do it.

In the days when St. Alban's had rummage sales, many of us collected things we no longer used or needed, and donated them at the church so that others could benefit from them. Although the church is no longer holding rummage sales, there are still many ways to recycle used-but-usable items.

(Check with each agency for guidelines on what they will accept.)

- Thrift stores will accept most usable items.
- The Volunteers of America and Furniture Bank of Central Ohio will pick things up from your home.
Clothing to be donated should be free of stains and rips
Furniture and electronics should be in working condition, not dangerous, not infested with insects.

And of course, the recycling truck comes around to us regularly to collect paper, some plastics, cans, and glass. Recycling is not a substitute for throwing things away. It takes thought and effort to sort through our possessions, decide what's worth recycling, and find appropriate ways to recycle those things.

Where might new thought and effort be appropriate for you and your household?

MARCH 19- SAINT JOSEPH

There are a number of Josephs in the Bible, among them (1) The son of Jacob who made a place for the Hebrews in Egypt in a time of famine; (2) a brother of Jesus; (3) Joseph of Arimathea, who received the body of Jesus for burial in his own tomb; and (4) a follower of Jesus who was considered but not chosen to fill Judas' position among the twelve apostles. On the church's calendar, March 19 is the day on which we remember Joseph, the husband of Mary and legal father of Jesus.

In the gospels, Joseph is mentioned only in stories of Jesus' childhood, and only in the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. He appears most prominently in the early chapters of Matthew. Luke 2 tells of Joseph's presence in the Jerusalem Temple when Jesus was 12 years old, but that is the latest of Joseph's appearances. He may have been considerably older than Mary. He is honored for his faithfulness to God and his nurturing role in the life of Jesus.

In some communities, it is traditional to give food to the needy on St. Joseph's Day. Spanish people celebrate St. Joseph's Day as their version of Father's Day, and on it, children often cook breakfast for their fathers or give them small gifts. Remember and give thanks for those who have shown to you the faithfulness and nurture of loving fatherhood.

PRAY

O God, who from the family of your servant David raised up Joseph to be the guardian of your incarnate Son and the spouse of his virgin mother: Give us grace to imitate his uprightness of life and his obedience to your commands, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. BCP, page 239

MARCH 20 - THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Today is the first day of spring, the day of the spring equinox. The sun sits above the equator, making day and night of equal length. What says spring to you? If it's birdsong, put out food or water for birds. If it's flowering plants, you might visit the Franklin Park Conservatory or plan a flower garden (It's too early to plant seeds, even indoors – see March 23.) If it's outdoor-friendly weather, you might go for a walk to look for blooming flowers and listen for the songs of birds. Longer days can certainly brighten the spirits! There's a Lenten hymn (145) that celebrates this joy even now. It begins:

Now quit your care and anxious fear and worry; for schemes are vain and fretting brings no gain. Lent calls to prayer, to trust and dedication; God brings new beauty nigh; reply, reply, reply with love to love most high; reply, reply, reply with love to love most high.

“God brings new beauty nigh.” Where is beauty most apparent to you? Does it strike you most deeply in the music of a favorite composer, in paintings of a particular school or artist, in dance, in words of poetry, in scents that remind you of places and times you have delighted in? Which sense(s) bring(s) you the most profound experiences of beauty? Take time today to sink down into a beauty that speaks to you of the goodness of God.

What did you choose?

If you did this on another day, what beauty might you choose?

MARCH 21

Our Caring & Sharing partner for March is PIMIL, Partners in Ministry in Liberia. Located on the west coast of Africa, Liberia began in the late 1800s as a refuge for Black people from the United States and Caribbean, both enslaved and free-born. Its constitution was modelled after that of the United States, and its capital, Monrovia, named for an American president. In the late 20th century, power differentials between Africo-Liberians and Americo-Liberians led to devastating civil wars which killed 8% of the country's population. In 2015, 83% of the population still lived below the international poverty line.

Education is highly valued in Liberia, but the education system was devastated by the civil wars, with many schools and school supplies destroyed. Students now must pay to go to school. From elementary school to secondary school and beyond, many young people can attend school only with outside financial help. That is where PIMIL comes in, raising money to fund students in pursuing their education. Total funds sent to Liberia last year added up to \$66,920, which includes that year's Caring & Sharing gifts from St. Alban's.

In the United States, today is also National Teenager Day. Good coincidence! On page 829, the Book of Common Prayer offers this prayer for the care of children:

Almighty God, heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them us, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, flowing the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.



MARCH 22- WORLD WATER DAY

“We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

“We thank you, Father for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”

Thus begins the Thanksgiving over the Water at every baptism. For each and every one of us, the Christian life begins in water.

And so does physical life. Before we were born, each of us floated weightless in amniotic fluid. From the time we were born, water has been something we could not live without. And so, on World Water Day, we are reminded of the need all living creatures have for water. Plain old water.

For most of us, it is easy to take that for granted. It's easy to take any basic, simple thing for granted. For today, how about going “back to basics” to name, appreciate and give thanks for some of the simple things that sustain your life?

MARCH 23- NATIONAL AGRICULTURE DAY

Want to get started on your garden? A few plants can be planted outdoors as soon as soil is thawed and workable. These include lettuce, spinach, kale, cabbage, chard.

Most seeds will not germinate when soil and air are that cold, however. The last day of freezing temperatures in this area is about May 13, and the last day with frost is about May 9. To start the seeds of garden plants indoors, check each seed packet to see how long before plants go into the ground you can safely start them. Planted too early, they're likely to be spindly and unhealthy. They'll need about six weeks indoors.

Use seeds bought this year or last year; older seeds may not sprout. They'll need warm, moist soil and good light – not a windowsill (too cold and not bright enough), but a fluorescent light. Keep lights 2-4 inches above seedlings, and allow 12-16 hours of light per day. Water with a spray bottle or from a tray underneath so as to avoid disturbing the soil, but don't leave plants standing in water. Use small individual containers, clean of all old soil and roots. Plant only one or two seeds in each container, and if two plants sprout in one pot, cut one off at soil level right away. A clear plastic dome over plants will retain moisture and allow light to pass; remove it when growing plants touch it. Fertilize weekly after seedlings have several sets of true leaves.

Almighty God, we thank you for making the earth fruitful, so that it might produce what is needed for life. Bless those who work in the fields; give us seasonable weather; and grant that we may all share the fruits of the earth, rejoicing in your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
From the Prayer Book, p 824.

MARCH 24- OSCAR ROMERO

Oscar Romero worked as a carpenter and gold miner before attending seminary in Rome. Ordained a priest, he returned to El Salvador and worked among the poor. After he was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador and a Jesuit friend of his was assassinated, he began protesting the government's injustice to the poor and practice of torture. He pleaded with the US government to stop sending military aid to his country, with no success. Romero was shot to death while celebrating mass on March 24, 1980.

In his sermon on that day, he said,

“God’s reign is already present on our earth in mystery. When the Lord comes, it will be brought to perfection.” This is the hope that inspires Christians. We know that every effort to better society, especially when injustice and sin are so ingrained, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God demands of us.

In 1977, he wrote:

The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violent e of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that will to beat weapons into sickles for work.

Bishop Romero is honored as a martyr in the calendars of several churches, including our own. His prophetic voice is one that can comfort the afflicted, but certainly afflict the comfortable.

MARCH 25- THE ANNUNCIATION

Exactly nine months before Christmas, the church celebrates the event narrated in Luke 1:26-38:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Mary "was very much perplexed" by what she heard from God through the angel. What perplexes you about the Christian faith?

Mary received a call to a life she had never wanted or planned. She didn't understand it at first, but she said "yes." What is the "yes" that you are called to say?

MARCH 26

March is National Nutrition Month

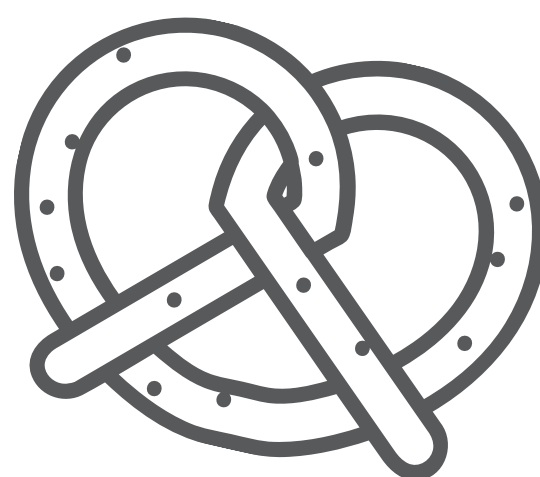
The season of Lent can include a number of dietary customs and observances, some of which are religious, some not. Two especially Lenten foods are pretzels (which have been imagined to have the shape of hands folded in prayer) and hot cross buns. A salty and a sweet – something for everyone. Both of these can be purchased, of course, but why not make some? Both include yeast, and will take time.

For pretzels, in about 30 minutes you will:

- Mix the dough
- Knead the dough
- Make your dough into ropes and shape them into pretzels.
- Boil them very briefly.
- Drain them
- Cover them with egg wash and salt them.
- Bake them
- Broil them to brown the tops.

Look for the recipe in your Lent@Home bag.

Enjoy!



MARCH 27- THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Today's New Testament Eucharistic lesson includes these words from II Corinthians:

"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

"Reconciliation." If there has ever been a time when the world needed reconciliation, we are living in it. In the Catechism of our church, printed in the back of the Book of Common Prayer (page 855), we are told that "The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons." The ministry of each order is described, and the ministry of lay people is specified as one that includes "carrying on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world." Since every baptized Christian is a lay person to begin with, this is a calling that all of us share.

Christ's work is not to reconcile all human beings in a lowest-common-denominator friendliness, but to reconcile the whole world to God. If we are to share in that ministry, the first step will be accepting our own reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ.

Whatever each of us may have done or experienced to distance us from God, by the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, the distance is gone, and we are held close to the heart of God. You might journal and pray about what this blessing of reconciliation means, or could mean, in your own life.

MARCH 28- JAMES SOLOMON RUSSELL

James Solomon Russell was born into slavery in 1857, and reunited with his family after the Civil War. Russell was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1887. Known as the father of St. Paul's College (one of three historically Black Episcopal Colleges), he also founded a school and numerous Black Episcopal congregations. He long advocated for Black clergy to be treated equally with white clergy, but with no success. Russell was the first African American elected bishop in The Episcopal Church, but twice declined his election. Why decline? His reason is given in various sources as either because he saw his ongoing work for Saint Paul College as too important to give up, or because he would have been designated "Suffragan Bishop for Colored Work," meaning he would function as a subordinate racial bishop. Consistent with his principles, he refused to accept lesser status on account of his race. In 1996, he was designated as a local saint for the Diocese of Southern Virginia, and he now appears in the calendar of our whole church.

Bishops are important in The Episcopal Church. The word "bishop" means "overseer," so a bishop is the overseer of a diocese. Bishops can be "diocesan" (elected to be in charge of a diocese), "coadjutor" (elected to succeed a current bishop who will soon retire), "suffragan" (elected as a subsidiary bishop, often for a specific region or function), "assistant" (already a bishop, appointed to assist a diocesan bishop) and "provisional" (already a bishop, serving as bishop in a diocese that doesn't have one). In our diocese, The Rt. Rev. Wayne Smith serves as our Provisional Bishop until a new bishop can be elected.

MARCH 29

*Prayer the Church's banquet, Angels' age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heaven and
earth.*

*Engine against th'Almighty, sinners' tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side piercing spear,
The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;*

*Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted Manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise.*

*Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's
blood, The land of spices, something understood.*

This poem, "Prayer (I)" was written by George Herbert, an early-17th century parish priest and poet who appears on our church's calendar every February 27. Do his words on prayer ring true to you? Which phrases or lines particularly resonate with your experience of prayer or your vision of what prayer could be?



MARCH 30

Loving God, neighbor, and self are important, but each of us is also responsible for considering the wellbeing of God's good creation. Take time to notice habits and practices by which you and your household have imposed unnecessary burdens on the people and world around you. During Lent, choose at least one change you can make in your usual behavior to reduce the burden you place on creation.

Here are some possibilities, but there are many more: (1) take reusable bags with you when you shop to replace one-use plastic bags; (2) turn your thermostat down by one degree; (3) turn off water when brushing your teeth; (4) go meat-free for a day, or for one day each week; (5) run your dishwasher and washing machine only when you have full loads.

What might you try?

From the Book of Common Prayer, page 827, comes this prayer:

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MARCH 31- JOHN DONNE

“Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls: It tolls for thee.”

These words are part of the poem “No Man Is an Island,” written by English priest and poet John Donne in the early 17th century. “Tolling” is the slow, solemn ringing of one bell to signify respect and sorrow. Before more rapid methods of communication, it was customary in many places to let the local community know of a death through the tolling of a bell.

As loved ones have died, most adults have experienced the feeling that something of themselves has died as well. Donne’s words draw on that experience to speak about the interrelation of all human beings: even if you don’t know who it was who died, a part of you dies with each human death.

Through the wonders of modern media, we now see and hear about so many dying and dead people every day. Starvation in Madagascar, landslides in Brazil, shootings in Columbus . . . it would be easy to lump all the deaths together as expectable and not really relevant to us. But should we?

Beyond your family and other loved ones, what deaths matter to you? The deaths of children? Of health care workers and police? Of homeless people living under bridges? Can people’s deaths matter to us if their lives didn’t matter?

If you truly believed that “no man is an island,” would you behave differently in any way?

APRIL 1

In the Daily Office lectionary for today, one of the lessons is from First Corinthians 12:

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.”

Paul often encouraged churches to welcome and honor varieties of gifts among their members. In Romans 12, he has a different list: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, compassion. Each list includes both people who speak the hard truths God wants others to hear and people who bring health and caring into the lives of others.

Today, a list of God’s gifts to the church through its members might be different, but always, always, it would be a list of gifts God is giving to all of us for the benefit of others.

What gifts do you receive through other people of faith?

What gifts is God offering to others through you?

APRIL 2

Ramadan begins at sunset today.

Ramadan is the Islamic month of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community. Muslims hold that all Scripture was revealed during Ramadan; the Torah, Psalms, Gospels, Quran. During this month more time than usual is devoted to prayer and acts of charity.

Although similar in some ways to the Christian season of Lent, Ramadan observances are more austere in some respects and more relaxed in others. A 30-day fast (from eating; drinking anything including water; sexual relations; sinful speech and behavior) is observed daily from sunrise to sunset. Still, a meal is eaten each day before sunrise and a community meal, often a banquet, after sunset.

Charitable giving, zakat, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is not optional for Muslims. Above a certain minimum, the value of 2.5% of one's possessions is to be given to the poor and needy (not the mosque) every year; many Muslims give a year's worth of zakat during Ramadan. In some countries (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia), zakat is collected by the state.

For Christians, charitable giving can seem optional, a nice thing to do when you have plenty anyway and want to feel good about yourself. In Lent, fasting is sometimes seen as a way saving money to give to others.

What do you think about the relative understandings of fasting and charitable giving in Islam and Christianity? How do you understand these things? How do you practice them?

APRIL 3 - THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

From the website of The Center for Action and Contemplation:

Father Richard Rohr founded the CAC in 1987 because he saw a deep need for the integration of both action and contemplation – the two are inseparable. As Father Richard likes to say, the most important word in our Center’s name is neither “action” nor “contemplation,” but the word “and.”

This means prayerfully letting go of our sense of control over our lives and cooperating with God’s work in the world. If we pray but fail to act justly, our faith won’t bear fruit. And without contemplation, even well-intended actions can cause more harm than good.

Many of us Christians “specialize” in one or the other – in prayer and contemplation, or in action to address the needs of the world. Churches set up committees based on this division – some people in our parish belong to Faith Formation, some belong to Social Concerns, but the two don’t overlap much. All Christians need help and support in both these areas, and committees like these are important to our health as a parish. Strengthening prayer practice and deepening compassionate engagement with the world cannot be alternatives, either for a parish or for a Christian individual. As Father Richard has said, the two are inseparable.

During Lent, how have you managed to balance the two in your life of faith?

As Lent draws closer to Easter, what might you do to come into better balance in your life with God?

APRIL 4 - MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Our country remembers Martin Luther King, Jr. on his birthday January 15, but it is the custom of the church to remember saints on the anniversary of their deaths. Not wanting to be left out, our calendar commemorates him on both dates. King was assassinated on April 3, 1968, but he is remembered on April 4 because April 3 had long been given to another holy person.

It's one thing to remember someone as a national hero, and another thing to include him in a list of saints of the church. Dr. King wasn't perfect – none of the saints has ever been perfect – but perfection is not a requirement. He is included on our calendar because of his prophetic vision, speech and action, all grounded in a deep and vibrant Christian faith. Although he was ordained as a Baptist minister, King is remembered in the Episcopal Church as “civil rights leader and martyr.” He worked for economic empowerment of the poor and against the Vietnam War, and was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for his commitment to nonviolent social change. All this he did, knowing he was risking his life. He lost that life to an assassin in 1968.

APRIL 4 - MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

It has always been true: true prophets always make people uncomfortable. Isaiah made people uncomfortable. Jeremiah made people uncomfortable. Amos made people uncomfortable. And Martin Luther King, Jr. made people uncomfortable – still makes some of us uncomfortable. That is true because prophets are not people who foretell the future, but people who give voice to God's judgment of the society they live in... and who likes being told their way of life is lacking in the eyes of God?

Is there someone in today's world whom you see as a prophet? Enough of a prophet to make you uncomfortable?



APRIL 5

What are the holy places, holy spaces, in your life? A sacred space is one set apart for devotion to God. “All creation is sacred” is true in one respect, but if everything is sacred, then nothing is set apart.

So the question again: in your life, what places or spaces are intentionally set apart for your life with God?

I hope St. Alban’s Church is one of them for all of us, but each of us needs more than that. A couple in my neighborhood have a gazebo in their back yard in which (in good weather) they share devotions every morning – that’s a holy place for them. I’ve never asked, but I’ll bet they have one inside their house for colder, hotter, wetter times. Sacred spaces won’t just happen to us – they take thought and effort. A corner in your home, a chair at the library or coffee shop, a bench in the park – where can you be that will remind you of the presence of God and call you back to your true self? Visit that place regularly, and keep it free from distractions and disturbances.

What will you look at in your holy place? An icon? A cross? A candle? A basket or weaving? The inside of your eyelids?

What will you listen to in your holy place? Classical music? Silence? Christian rock?

What will you smell in your holy place? Incense? Flowers? Your candle?

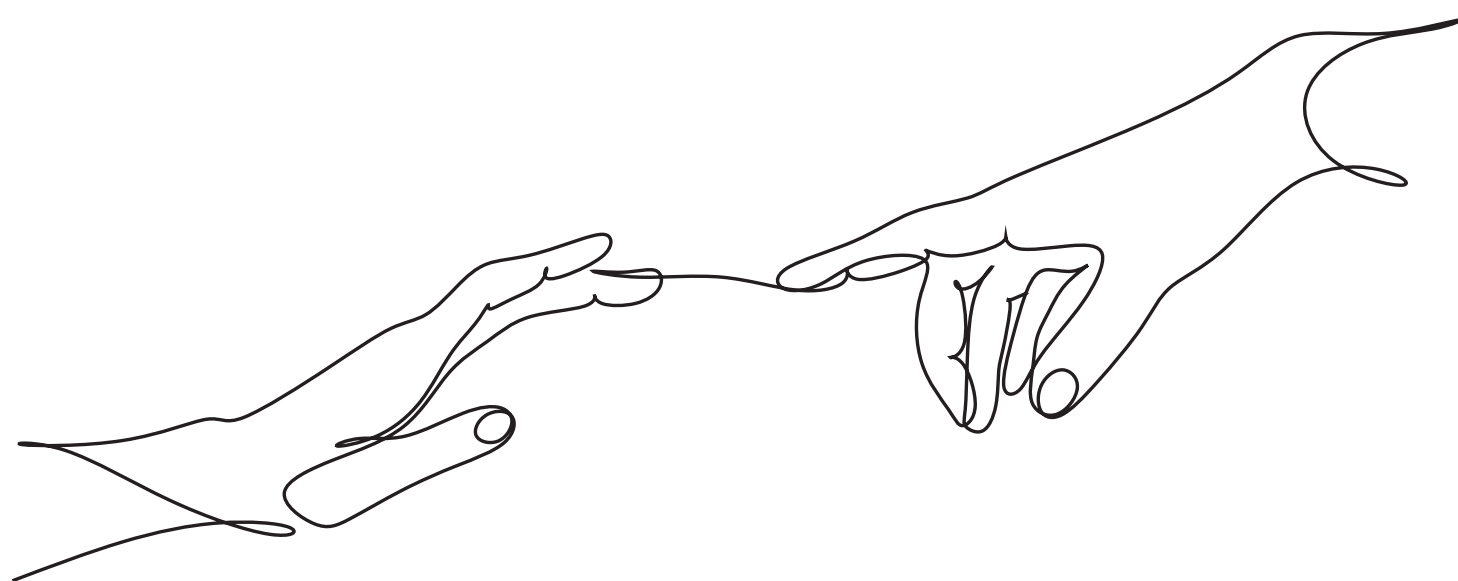
What will you hold? A rosary? A Bible? A Prayer Book? A cat?

APRIL 6

On this date in 1475, Michelangelo was born.

Interesting, isn't it? Our church's calendar of saints includes many musicians, poets and hymnwriters (including John and Charles Wesley, Efrem of Edessa, Fanny Crosby, JS Bach, GF Handel, Henry Purcell, Nikolai Grudtvig, Henry Burleigh, and Hildegarde of Bingen) but far fewer visual artists. Were painters less grounded in faith? Were they less effective at opening windows into God to the gaze of others?

The current popularity of Vincent Van Gogh might suggest otherwise. The son of a pastor, Van Gogh himself spent time as a Protestant missionary in Belgium before becoming a painter. His mental health was dreadful, and his life ended with suicide on July 29, 1890. Since his death, his paintings have been widely appreciated, opening the eyes of many to the beauty of the world God made.



APRIL 6

A Roman Catholic, Michelangelo was devoted both to Christ and to the pleasures of life (food, beauty, sex). His famous works include sculptures (David, a number of Pietas) and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. After the cleaning of the Chapel in 1995, Pope John Paul II said, “The truths of our faith speak to us here from all sides. . . The Sistine Chapel is precisely the sanctuary of the theology of the human body. In witnessing to the beauty of man created by God as male and female, it also expresses in a certain way the hope of a world transfigured, the world inaugurated by the risen Christ.”

Are there artists whose work speaks to you of God? For me (Marjorie), those have included Cranach, Durer, Cezanne, Dufy, Marsden Hartley, Arshile Gorky, Aminah Robinson.

Which visual artists open windows for you into God? Do you know what it is about their work that does this?



APRIL 7 - WORLD HEALTH DAY



The World Health Organization has designated this day as a time to “focus global attention on the urgent actions needed to keep humans and the planet healthy and to foster a movement to create societies focused on well-being.” They estimate that “over 13 million deaths each year are due to avoidable environmental causes. Over 13,000,000!

The climate crisis is the single biggest health threat facing humanity. The climate crisis is also a health crisis.” And all this, the WHO says, is being driven by our political, social, and commercial decisions. If you agree with the analysis of the WHO, what political changes do you believe might improve the situation? What might you do to help them happen?

What social changes do you believe might improve the situation? What might you do to help them happen?

What commercial changes do you believe might improve the situation? What might you do to help them happen?

APRIL 8

In today's II Corinthians lesson from the Daily Office lectionary, Paul wrote: "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of Darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God."

"The light of the knowledge of the glory of God" has shone in our hearts. Light shining out of darkness, shining in us. Illuminating the world, with the glory of God. Not our glory.

Often those who invite others to the worship of the church express their invitation in terms of how welcoming the congregation is, how compelling the sermons are, what good the church is doing in the world. All these things may be true, but in II Corinthians, Paul was onto something very important: it isn't all about how wonderful WE are. We are simply the clay jars holding God's light; it is all about how wonderful GOD is. The light we have to share is not our own light, but God's . . . God who has shone in us "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

APRIL 8

It can be easier to talk about how much you enjoy the church’s people than to talk about how much you enjoy finding God with those people. It’s embarrassing to talk about God . . . personal and intimate. . . bringing feelings of vulnerability, fears that we might be seen as trying to impose our faith on other people.

Do you ever talk about God, even with people you know and trust?

Try it with one person, church member or not, and listen to what they have to say about God in response.



APRIL 9 - DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

A theologian in Germany as Nazism grew, Bonhoeffer was a leading spokesman for the Confessing Church, the center of Protestant resistance to Hitler and his ideas. He was arrested and imprisoned in 1943. When an attempt to assassinate Hitler failed in July 1944, it was discovered that he had been a part of that conspiracy. He was taken to Buchenwald concentration camp and then to Schoenberg Prison, where he was hanged on April 9, 1945.

As a theologian, Bonhoeffer was a pacifist. He accepted the guilt of plotting death for Hitler because he believed that not to do so would be a greater evil. His book *The Cost of Discipleship* reflects how complex he experienced following Jesus to be.

Do right and wrong seem distinct for you in every situation? Or have there been times in your life when (like Bonhoeffer) you have found it necessary to do something you believed to be wrong because the only alternatives would bring about a greater evil? Is there a “right choice” in every situation?

Does “What would Jesus do?” help you to answer these questions?

APRIL 10 - PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

As if the world were not fearsome enough – COVID, mask mandates, war in Eastern Europe, climate disasters – as if the world were not fearsome enough, dystopian ideas abound. On broadcast and streaming media, in novels and video games, the threat of doom looms large. A new plague. An asteroid crashing to earth. An evil power wreaking havoc everywhere. An end to American democracy. Something fearsome is about to put an end to life as we know it. Where can we find hope?

In the time and place where Jesus lived, many people also found it difficult to see reason for hope. The country was ruled by an occupying power. In the midst of heavy taxes, a corrupt elite, teachers and sects spreading various ideas about where it all would lead, the best hope seemed to be that God would send a powerful leader to overthrow evil and fix everything.

And then God did the unexpected. God came in Jesus, a vulnerable human being, not to overthrow evil by violence, but to lead humanity into the way of self-giving love. In this Holy Week, as always, the true source of our own hope is not violent strength, but divine love as shown in Jesus.

APRIL 10 - PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry calls on Episcopalians to follow with Jesus on that way with him. He teaches what the Christian faith has always taught: that our hope is in the love of God.

Bishop Curry teaches that the Way of Love has seven elements:

- Turn (pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus)
- Learn (reflect on Scripture each day, especially Jesus' life and teaching)
- Pray (dwell intentionally with God each day)
- Worship (gather in community weekly to thank, praise, and dwell with God)
- Bless (share faith and unselfishly give and serve)
- Go (cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus)
- Rest (receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration)

And thereby we find hope.



APRIL 11 - MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Have you wondered what it's like to pray the rosary? To adapt and simplify it a bit: a rosary is a ring of beads which leads the praying person through a repeating series of prayers. A rosary has five sets of ten beads; as you hold each of these small beads, working around the circle, you repeat the short prayer you have chosen. The decades are separated by larger beads, on each of which the Lord's Prayer is said. Begin the rosary by reciting the Apostles' Creed as you hold the cross that hangs from the ring of beads. Then say the doxology and begin to pray with the ring of beads. Move your fingers around it, holding each small bead in turn as you say your short prayer, and saying the Lord's Prayer on each larger bead.

Yes, it's very repetitive, and some of us have been taught to scorn that. But it is not necessarily a bad thing. What would it be like to let go of mind-stimulating novelty and simply rest in the words and the presence of God?

Would you like to try? First, you need to choose a prayer or Scripture to repeat through the decades. Roman Catholics and some Episcopalians use the "Hail Mary" prayer; for those who would prefer something else, how about your favorite Bible verse? Or a few verses from a Psalm?

At the conclusion of the rosary, you might sing a hymn or pray a collect from the Prayer Book. The prayer of self-dedication (page 832) might be a good choice:

Almighty and eternal God, so draw my heart to you, so guide my mind, so fill my imagination, so control my will, that I may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use me, I pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

APRIL 12 - TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

In Lent and Holy Week, the biblical story of the Exodus is in the background of the stories we tell.

After leaving slavery in Egypt, the Hebrew people wandered in the wilderness for forty years, often hungry and thirsty, tempted to reject the God who had led them there.

Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, hungry and thirsty, tempted to abandon his faithfulness to God in favor of food and power. Christians spend forty days in Lent, realizing and battling anew the hungers that tempt us to put other things in the place that belongs to God. Temptation has always been a part of the human experience. What temptations of your own have you recognized during this season?

Every day in the wilderness, God fed the people with manna (a Hebrew word which can be translated “what’s THAT?”). Tempted to transform stones into bread to satisfy his hunger, Jesus remembered the words of Scripture: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Biblical words, words given to us from God, feed us through our lives and sustain us during Lent. What words of Scripture do you rely on to feed you in the hungry times?

Led up the mountain by God, Moses received the ten commandments by which God’s people should live.

Led upward by Jesus, his disciples heard the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) in which he told them what a life of blessing would look like.

What new obedience to God has been part of your life this Lent? What new blessing have you found?

APRIL 13 - WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

For 200 years, The Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East has been supported annually by a Good Friday offering from The Episcopal Church. Their ministry includes schools, hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centers, and retirement centers, and is extended to people without regard to religion or ethnicity.

In particular, past Good Friday offerings have helped support:

- The Mission to Seafarers in the United Arab Emirates, serving sailors who labor for long months at sea;
- The Arab Episcopal School in Irbid, Jordan, which educates blind students;
- St. Christopher's Cathedral in Bahrain, which focuses on providing food and care for migrant workers who have lost their jobs and cannot get flights back home;
- Arab Ahli Hospital in Gaza, which continues to provide care amid shortages of medicines, fuel for generators, food, and medical disposables.

For those who would like to contribute to this year's Good Friday offering, a secure website is found at iam.ec/goodfridayoffering.

Checks can be mailed to
DFMS – The Episcopal Church
PO Box 958938
St. Louis, Missouri 63195-8983

They should be made payable to "The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society," with "Good Friday Offering" in the memo line.

APRIL 14 - MAUNDY THURSDAY

In his meditation for Maundy Thursday 2021, Richard Rohr quotes from the work of Cynthia Bourgeault:

“What is the meaning of the passion? First of all, God wasn’t angry. Again: God wasn’t angry! Particularly in fundamentalist theology, you’ll often hear it said that God got so fed up with the sins and transgressions of Israel that he demanded a human sacrifice in atonement. But of course, this interpretation would turn God into a monster. How can Jesus, who is love, radiate and reflect a God who is primarily a monster? And how can Christians theoretically progressing on a path of love consent to live under such a reign of terror? No, we need to bury once and for all those fear-and-punishment scenarios that got programmed into so many of us during our childhood. There is no monster out there; only love waiting to set us free.”

From what has love set you free?

From what do you long to be set free?

For what do you hope to be set free?

APRIL 15 - GOOD FRIDAY

As Jesus hung on the cross, “from noon on, darkness came over the whole land.” (Matthew 27:45).

In the CAC archive are found these words by Barbara Holmes, a Black woman who distinguishes among varieties of darkness in the world and in her own life.

“There are many kinds of darkness. There is the darkness of determined ignorance and hatred, impenetrable and smothering. There is the tiny microcosm of darkness that gave birth to the universe, its new realities and new worlds. There is the mothering darkness of the womb, and the protective darkness of the ‘cloud by night’” (which led the Hebrew people in their Exodus from Egypt).

“Because I saw my aunties negotiate darkness as a reality with as much potential as light, I stopped being afraid of the dark. I realized that sight and insight were not dependent upon the glaring light produced by humans, for there was an inner light that glowed and revealed much more. . . . “An eclipse occurs when an object gets between us and another object and blocks our view. We are not permanently blocked from the light. . . . we have a dimming of the familiar and a loss of taken-for-granted cues that we rely upon every day to remind us of who we are and why we are here.”

Today Christians remember the darkest part of the story of Jesus. It is a sad and tragic story, but paradoxically, this darkness has within it the germ of glory. And today’s darkness is the only way to get there.

Remember that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart with thanksgiving.

APRIL 16 - HOLY SATURDAY

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life, who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole church, that wonderful and sacred mystery. By the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Today we wait.

Even if you are cooking, or traveling, or cleaning, or shopping, or adorning the church for the celebration . . . even while you are very busy preparing for Easter . . . may today be for you a day of waiting with God. In the midst of whatever your life brings, remember what matters most:

"For God alone my soul in silence waits; from him comes my salvation."

- Psalm 62:1