



**LENT / EASTER 2025  
DAILY DEVOTIONAL**

# Walk in Newness of Life

**ROMANS 6:4**

**March 5 - April 20, 2025**

Ministers of Word and  
Sacrament and Ruling  
Elders from across  
Presbytery of San Jose  
share reflections on daily  
lectionary readings.

The Presbytery of San Jose  
serves the counties of Santa  
Clara, Santa Cruz, and  
Monterey, California.

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# 2025 Lent / Easter

Dear Friends of the Presbytery of San José, Siblings in Faith, Colleagues in Ministry:

Grace and peace in the name of the living God, revealed in the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ, in the fellowship of Holy Spirit!

As a people redeemed in Christ, we live with hope and promise, when confronted with and experience peril, despair, trouble, violence, the shadows of death, and death itself. The 14<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Christian mystic, Juliana of Norwich, famously wrote: "All will be well/All manner of things will be well." Hers was not wishful thinking or baseless optimism. Rather, she gave voice and song to every generation who follows the Lord Christ and who lives with the prayer, "Thy kingdom come/ Thy will be done/On earth as it is in heaven."

Together with our Presbytery moderator, Libby Boatwright, we have selected "Walk in Newness of Life" as the theme for this daily devotional booklet taken from the words from Romans 6:4c. The whole verse speaks quite robustly and cogently about what the Calvin called the "mortification" and "vivification" of our lives, or the dying with and rising with Christ (see *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.3.1). What the apostle Paul describes is our union with Christ, our participation in Christ's death and our participation in Christ's life. In liturgical/worship studies, this is described when we consider Jesus's baptism in the Jordan: in his going into the water, we go to the depths of death with him; in his rising from the water, we emerge in newness of life. The ancient church connected this dying-rising in describing baptismal fonts as both "tomb" and "womb" – we die to our old selves because of Christ's death and we rise in newness of life, being birthed in Christ's resurrection through the power of Holy Spirit.

As you read, reflect, and pray through this daily devotional, using the daily lectionary readings for Year C, written by teaching and ruling elders of the Presbytery of San José, may this be a season of discerning the heart of God in Christ for you and for the world, and therefore, be a renewed sense of walking anew with the Lord. In doing so, let us be inspired to work and pray for a world that lives in newness of life, where God's love and justice abounds. Called to community, Committed to justice. That's who we are as God's people in the Presbytery.

In the Holy One—Jesus the Christ -- our Joy and Justice,

The Rev. Dr. Neal D. Presa, Executive Presbyter

# About the Cover

In keeping with our theme “Walking in Newness of Life” (Romans 6:4) we’ve chosen the beautiful stained glass window on the chancel at Foothill Presbyterian Church created by the artist Pat Scarlett Haeger from Haeger Stained Glass. It was presented on Easter in 1994 by Dr. Francis and Mary Craighead Whittaker in honor of their sons. Embedded deep in the piece are symbols representing renewal and life. So walk with me through this wondrous piece of art as a representation of our Lenten journey.



*At its center is the Celtic Cross, representing both our connection to Celtic ancestry/origins and Jesus' sacrifice*

*Emanating from the cross both above and below is Radiant Light- The Light of Christ*

*On the third and seventh tier below the cross is the Red Ribbon of Salvation*

*At the top of the glass is the Dove- representing The Holy Spirit*

*On the left quadrant above the cross and below the cross on the right and left are 12*

*Clusters of Leaves- representing The Twelve Apostles*

*Rising upward on the bottom of the cross are Flames- The Holy Spirit*

*On the right quadrant below the cross are Grapes- representing the sacrament of Communion*

*On the left quadrant below the cross is a Scalloped Shell- representing our sacrament of Baptism and Rebirth*

*On the left quadrant below the scalloped shell are Three drops of water- representing The Holy Trinity*

*On the right quadrant below the cross is Wheat- The Bread of Life*

*On the bottom of the work above the four squares of the gospel writers is Water- representing Life and Death*

*On the cross at its base is a Barren Tree-representing Faith*

*The base that the cross stands on is a Triple Foundation-of Faith, Hope and Love*

*The square on the bottom left corner is a Winged Man- representing the gospel of Matthew*

*The square on the bottom to the right of Matthew is a Winged Lion- representing the gospel of Mark*

*The Square to the right of Mark is a Winged Ox-representing the gospel of Luke*

*The square on the bottom right corner is an Eagle- representing the gospel of John*

As Lent commemorates the season of trials leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus, it seems fitting that all these symbols are choreographed into one place as they represent our sacraments, the Trinity, light, life, death, bread, and our triple foundation of faith, hope and love. The foundational blocks of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are our narrative of the life of Christ. It is my prayer that as we read the devotionals and worship with our congregations our hearts will be revived and we will all walk in the newness of life.

*The Rev. Dr. Libby Boatwright, Moderator*

## Thursday, March 6

### Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

The passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians is one of the most famous in all of his letters. It has power, passion and poetry combined. Paul speaks from the heart for two reasons, for one, he was posted in Corinth longer than in most places in his ministry, so he truly cares for these people. This a relational letter. The second reason that he writes this concerns the Corinthians perceptions on what makes things spiritual. The Corinthian Christians are looking for power, charisma, charm, and status.

In the Corinthian letters we learn that Paul was constantly critiqued for how he looked, acted, preached and presented himself. They thought he was somewhat unimpressive. They wanted great preaching and exciting and dynamic worship with obvious manifestations of the spirit. Paul approaches these issues by developing a theology of the cross, he says that the Jews seek power, and the Greeks wisdom, but he preached the cross, which is the weakness and foolishness of God. So in Corinthians he turns human or cultural expectations upside down. This is the heart of Lent.

Paul, in Corinthians, clarifies what leads to, qualifies and establishes authentic spirituality. He comes at this from several angles, but here in this passage I believe that he gets to the heart of authentic spirituality, which is love of God and neighbor.

The first component of authentic spirituality is to make God's message of love to the world your message. To be as Paul says, an ambassador or diplomat to the world, asking and encouraging people to become reconciled to God and to each other. Christ made this possible by becoming sin for us and dying on the cross, so we could become righteous and be made right with God.

The second, and foundational component of authentic spirituality is to work together, as Paul says, to develop a synergy together with other Christians who have the same focus, who put reconciliation with Christ and each other first. Nothing is done in vain when you work with others, because you develop deep bonds of love.

The third component is to keep on keeping on. Paul lists the things that happened to him, trials, tribulations, worries, sleepless nights, danger, shipwrecks, jail time, poverty, anguish and really, really, really hard work in the middle of it all. Love never fails.

In our society we would list most if not all of these things as failures and flaws. Paul says that it is these experiences that establish our hearts because they open us up relationally.

Reconciliation is a relational theology. Relationships are either built or broken in the tough times. When you go through things with others who have the same purpose and the same focus and you face, endure and even sometimes overcome odds, you build the bonds of love.

#### **Prayer:**

Lord of love, give us the power, presence and patience to practice love in all of aspects of our lives. Amen

*The Rev. Larry Vilardo is an honorably retired minister member of the Presbytery of San José*

## Thursday, March 6

### Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

As I read this passage, I am struck by the many references to "refuge, fortress, protection and rescue." A refuge is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a condition of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, something providing shelter, an institution providing safe accommodation for people who have suffered violence from a spouse or partner." In ancient times the six cities of refuge were allocated to the Levite tribe to provide asylum for perpetrators of unintentional manslaughter. Divinely appointed and subject to Mosaic Law, the Levites were responsible to maintain the six cities, provide judicial authority and protection from the retribution of the avenging party until their case went to trial. The Levites were responsible to maintain these places and presided as the judicial authorities over them. They were the mediators between Israelites and God and the cities were strategically placed so that they were easily reached within one day of travel. Perhaps most importantly, they offered asylum to foreigners. Signposts with the word "Miklat" meaning refuge, were clearly marked.

In Joshua 20 we are told then when a person unintentionally harmed or killed someone they were to flee to one of the six cities of refuge, stand in front of the gate and plead their case to the elders who were then required to admit the fugitive inside their gates and offer them asylum. If an individual were to approach the gates of the city and demand blood justice from an offender, the elders were not allowed to surrender the person in question. It was a fortress of protection until the trial was complete. The priests were their guardians of safety

In this time of tribulation and unrest, borders closing, armed guards and threats posed at those who have lived in our country for decades and nurtured families--many taking jobs few would ever want, how we can sit complacent and not be the protectors, the Levites? What is our role in protecting those who are our co-workers, our friends, our parishioners? My heart is heavy as I recall a recent incident where a student's parents had been deported leaving a family without a mother and a father. In times like this, I call on God for answers, praying there will be practical solutions; I remember that Christ offers us protection from eternal death and take refuge in him, the High Priest who acquits us from the condemnation of the law. I pray that no weapon formed against us will harm the innocent, the foreigner, the sojourner. The question in this time of Lent is: do we have the courage to be the guardians of safety?

#### **Prayer:**

Lord and guardian of our souls, I thank you that you offer the courage required to speak mercy and justice when the innocent are unjustly accused and suffer unspeakable punishment. Grant us the strength and insight to create practical solutions in a time when cities of refuge have vanished. As believers, let us be the protectors, those who will not surrender your precious children. In your name we pray, AMEN.

*The Rev. Dr. Libby Boatwright is an honorably retired minister member of  
and moderator of the Presbytery of San José*

# Friday, March 7

## Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 6:1-13; Acts 7:35-42

I think one of the great strengths of our faith is that in leaning into the mystery of being, it teases out great paradoxes. We serve a God who is both eternal and yet exists in time. Our savior is both human and divine. Perhaps among the most pressing of these paradoxes during the season of Lent is that of the tension between permanence and impermanence. Two days ago, on Ash Wednesday, we were reminded of our impermanence -- we are mere dust and that to dust we shall return -- even as we were reminded of the immortality of our souls.

And in today's passages we are reminded of the impermanence of our earthly sanctuaries and sacred objects just as we are asked to consider the permanence of our refuge in God. The Psalmist declares that even the most vulnerable of dwellings -- a tent -- can be made a fortress with faith. Mere skin and sticks protection against evil and plague.

On the other hand, Stephen admonishes those who would seek to construct something more permanent. He reminds us that the golden calf forged by the Israelites, though seemingly strong and stable, was without the Spirit of God, and thus brought no strength to the vulnerable sojourners. Without God, even the seemingly impenetrable is mere molten metal.

During Lent we are asked to wander into the wilderness. In doing so, we must reckon with our impermanence without falling victim to the temptation to solve it with some seemingly permanent solution which is only and ever the work of our own hands. The solution to our vulnerability is not a bigger fortress, a shinier idol, a more efficient institution, or even more money -- it is simply faith.

Today's idolatry doesn't look like the worship of golden calves -- it looks like the worship of our own permanence. I have found that the balm for my own idolatry lies in listening to those who have by necessity or choice rejected such permanence. Immigrants for whom the Israelite's stories of exile and wandering, subjugation and oppression by a powerful empire are not mere stories but a lived reality. Unhoused brothers and sisters for whom a tent is not a mere symbol in an ancient text but a sanctuary from the storm. When Jesus said "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God," I believe he was speaking to the lived faith of our neighbors -- reminding us not that we are stronger than them for having passports or homes, but perhaps weaker for having to rely on such false permanences for our faith to thrive (Luke 6:20).

Day after day, my own anxiety about the chaos of this wandering world is abated by people who have fewer impermanent material possessions than I do, and perhaps more permanent faith. They are "living oracles" to me (Acts 7:38), reminding me, as my neighbor who lives with incessant insecurity and great faith does every day: "Primero Dios." First, God.

### Prayer:

God of the exile, the unhoused, the insecure, and the often unheard, may you build us a dwelling in your shelter, abiding with us in the shadow of doubt and death, daily indignities and disagreements, and daring us to delve deeper into the wilderness, where your Spirit calls out beyond the borders, calling us by name. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

*The Rev. Julianne Porras-Center is executive director/organizing pastor of Somos Watsonville*

# Saturday, March 8

## Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

### 2

Whenever I read this passage, I am transported back to the fourth grade. This was a time before legal challenges succeeded in banning bible reading in public schools, and everyday a student in my class selected and read a bible passage aloud at the beginning of the school day. Everyone loved this passage in Ecclesiastes, so we heard it multiple times each month.

It was easy to love; it's poetic and simple to read. There aren't any complicated names or places to pronounce, and no confusing tales to try and understand. But we eight- and nine- year olds didn't read the warning in it; we mainly liked the flow. We had very little concept of time at that age and the future was something that would take care of itself; or so we thought. Seasons were those things that we marked by the changes of our wardrobes.

Reading it as an older person, I sometimes feel that I'm playing experiential bingo. Did I experience war and peace? Yup. What about love and hate? Uh-huh. What happens if I tick all the boxes? Is that it? Fortunately, this passage is more than a warning; it's also a promise. We will experience many events, both good and bad, and this is part of the human experience. Yes, we will mourn, but we will also love. Our "stones" may be scattered and tossed about, but there will be a time when we can gather them back together. It is a choice, sometimes a difficult choice, to look towards better times when things are hard, and it seems as though there is no end. Jesus lived among us to share these same human experiences, rejoicing in good times, weeping in times of loss and eventually triumphing over death itself. We know that Jesus sees and understands our suffering and is with us always.

### Prayer:

Lord of every time and season, be with us always. Heal the broken and give solace to those in despair. We trust that you have that power. Help us to be signs of your love and hope to those around us that we might bring heaven to this earth. In your name we pray. Amen.

*Sharon Rowser is a ruling elder of Foothill Community Presbyterian Church in San José*

# Sunday, March 9 (First Sunday in Lent)

## Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

A beautiful Psalm which talks about God's presence in all aspects of life, in light and shadow. The text has tremendous power.

It opens with "You who live in the shelter of the Most High." It implies not everyone does. God is so great even His shadow protects us when we choose to "abide in the shadow." In the end of verse 2 there is a powerful declaration of faith in "My refuge, My Fortress."

Fear constantly attacks our minds. Whether it is fire or storm, sickness, financial insecurity or loneliness. The message is clear "abide in the Almighty."

I love the idea of "abiding in the shadow" because often that is where we will find God waiting patiently for us.

In triumph we read on "For He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you in all in all your ways" vs 11. If we love Him, He will deliver us. "I will protect those who know my Name" vs14 "I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation". vs16 Thanks be to God!

### **Prayer:**

Father, we thank you for your promised presence in light and shadow. As your son endured the shadow of the cross, help us to abide in that presence and walk with you through all things. Amen.

*Ian Adamson is a ruling elder of Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church in Santa Cruz*

# Monday, March 10

## Psalm 17

Psalm 17 is an intense, heartfelt prayer from someone who sees themselves as being on the right side of God. The writer insists they don't plot evil, their words are pure, they steer clear of bribes, and they try to follow God's ways in everything they do. But they also cry out for protection from wicked people, fully believing those people deserve God's judgment: *"May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies; may their children gorge themselves on it, and may there be leftovers for their little ones."* (Psalm 17:14)

What makes this psalm so striking is its raw honesty. It exposes our human tendency—we often see ourselves as the "good guys" who deserve God's blessing, while our enemies deserve the worst. The psalmist does not hold back their emotions. They want justice. They want those who have wronged them to pay. And yet, what stands out is that they do not take justice into their own hands. Instead, they bring their case before God, trusting Him to act with both mercy and justice.

Perhaps the psalmist understands what is later echoed in Scripture: *"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord."* (Romans 12:19) They know that seeking revenge on their own would only lead them into sin, pulling them away from God's path. Instead of responding with violence or hatred, they surrender their grievances to the One who judges righteously.

This psalm remains deeply relevant to our lives today. We all face situations where people betray us, slander us, or cause us harm. Our natural reaction may be to wish them misfortune, believing that justice demands they suffer for what they've done. But Psalm 17 challenges us to recognize that no one is truly righteous—not even ourselves. Jesus Himself said, *"No one is good—except God alone."* (Mark 10:18) No matter how justified we feel in our anger, we must remember that we too fall short of God's glory.

This psalm teaches us to bring our pain, our anger, and our desire for justice before God rather than acting out of our own judgment. We can trust that He sees all things clearly, and in His perfect wisdom, He will deal with both the righteous and the wicked. Our role is not to bring destruction to our enemies but to entrust them to God, who judges with mercy and justice. In doing so, we free ourselves from the burden of vengeance and remain on the path of righteousness.

### Prayer:

Dear Jesus, You see all things clearly—both the good and the brokenness in us and in the world. When we are hurt, betrayed, or wronged, help us to bring our pain to You instead of holding onto anger or seeking revenge. Remind us that You are the just and merciful Judge, and that our role is to trust You, not to take matters into our own hands. Soften our hearts. Keep us from pride that blinds us to our own faults. Help us to walk in righteousness, not by our own strength, but by Your grace. Teach us to love, even when it's hard, and to trust that You will bring justice in Your perfect time and way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Vincent Arishvara is pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in San José*

## Tuesday, March 11

### Psalm 17; Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21

These three passages took me through a bit of a journey that I would like to share.

Initially, the first passage was something I could not bring myself to pray. I wish I could say that my steps have held to His paths and that I have not stumbled, but that would be far from the truth. And while I wanted deeply for those things described in verses 6-8, I felt unworthy and undeserving to even bring myself to ask.

The second passage addressed those feelings. For me, it painted an evocative picture of Joshua and, by extension, all of God's people. Like Joshua, we came before God filthy, unworthy and undeserving. But the LORD stood up for us. He made us worthy and deserving by choosing us and clothing us in clean clothes.

The third passage left me with a promise and a warning. First, the promise, that "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteousness under punishment until the day of judgement" But then, a warning: "For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them."

If my faith is genuine, then I would not want to sully the cleanliness that came through Jesus' sacrifice. I saw David's prayer in a new light. It changed from a prayer that I was hesitant to pray to one that I wanted to pray desperately.

In this Lent season, let us not forget where we came from and who lifted us up. Help us to remember his sacrifice and desperately want to stay clean.

#### **Prayer:**

Jesus, I came to You filthy, not deserving of anything, but by Your grace and mercy, You made me clean. The world around me threatens to bring me down, to turn me away from Your promises. But now that I am clean, I want to stay that way, so that I can stand before You unashamed. Amen.

*Doug Kang is a ruling elder of Cornerstone Church of Silicon Valley in San José*

# Wednesday, March 12

## Psalm 17

### "The Cry of Our Heart to Our God"

As often as we voice it in our prayers. As often as we sing it in our worship. As often as it occurs to us in our close moments. Yet eye hath not seen nor ear heard the fullness of our need for Him, nor the fullness of satisfaction that he is for us.

We cannot reach deep enough to bring utterance to this deep cry. The buried seed of his word, by his unsearchable grace, in the folds of our being from before time began. Crying out to him. Abba! Father!

The creation groans in travail, seeking to be delivered. O wretched man that I am! O thrice and infinitely wretched broken unworthy bearer of a holy image. A walking contradiction and paradoxical mistake of a spark of existence. And such that even in my cry, can I say that I even wish to be saved?

Yet no mistake, for God will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. God will bless who he will bless. And blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Somehow he has deigned to bless us with that true spark of life. Deep down, it cries out, through the members warring in our flesh. It cries out in hunger and thirst after God - to be satisfied by him - to be justified by him - to be cloaked in his righteousness, and to see that righteousness exalted in victory.

So that cry rebounds through forever and finds its voice on the lips of David, singing out as the Holy Spirit prompts him - "Hear!" "Hear, o Lord!" But not only to hear - "Hear the right, O Lord." Blessed, the spirit of he who would identify completely with God. "I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, and hear my speech." That God has proved me; that he would find me worthy; that he would keep me as the apple of the eye, and hide me under the shadow of his wings.

Worthy not in myself, but in that I have identified with him - and yet again - by his grace, that I was given the seed of faith, to call out to him in belief. That I would hunger and thirst after righteousness - his righteousness. That I would be kept so near to him - the apple of the eye - resting under his wings.

And a proclamation, an affirmation, that I will find what I seek by his grace; satisfied and declared righteous in him. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

### Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we call upon thee to hear our prayer. Hear our cry for thy righteousness. Hear our paradoxical unworthiness yet searching for you who it cannot search for. Hear our dead and broken beings, made to live in you. Hear the right. Let your righteousness be established in victory. Keep us as the apple of your eye. Let us be there with you, and hunger and thirst no more. Amen

*Aaron Mohamed is a ruling elder of Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church in Santa Cruz*

# Thursday, March 13

## Philippians 3:2-12

Philippians 3:11-14 is one of the Scripture texts that the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) to describe the purpose and usefulness of the Ten Commandments in Q/A 115 of the Catechism. The response of the Catechism to the usefulness of the Decalogue was:

First, so that the longer we live

the more we may come to know our sinfulness  
and the more eagerly look to Christ  
for forgiveness of sins and righteousness.

Second, so that,  
we may never stop striving,  
and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit,  
to be renewed more and more after God's image,  
until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.

In my *Our Only Comfort: 52 Reflections on the Heidelberg Catechism* (WJKP, 2015), I observed the following: "J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy narrated the power of a ring, whose holder is drawn to the evil Eye of Sauron. The trilogy involves the struggle of hobbit Frodo Baggins and his friend, Sam, as they seek to return the ring to a volcanic mountain where the ring can finally be destroyed and the ominous threat of Sauron over Middle Earth could be vanquished. Frodo, as with others who come near the ring's presence, is tempted by the allure of its shine and Sauron's voice to put it on; the ring draws the heart and soul of its holder towards Sauron and evil.

Contrast to the ring of evil is the circular fellowship of faithful friends who seek to free Middle Earth. Their fellowship is to seek freedom, peace and love for all of Middle Earth; they covenant with each other to go through the treacherous terrain of monsters and battles to secure victory.

Marriage and the exchange of rings of promise are that way: the sight and touch of rings bring to heart, mind, and soul the promises made once upon a time, invoking consistent commitment, calling forth our best in the fellowship of *followership*.

But the rings themselves don't cause obedience; the rings in and of themselves don't have sway over our hearts. They call us to remembrance, they (re)kindle commitment, they provoke us to confession, repentance, and a sacred delight in our partners.

For the Reformed tradition, then, it's not a matter of pitting the law versus the gospel; the law is an expression of the gospel in that it arises from God's own heart, it expresses God's character, and God uses it, as like a ring, to impress upon us our fellowship with God and our fellowship of God in every aspect of our lives."

### Prayer:

Holy God, you love us that in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, you freed us to follow You and Your ways. Help us to cast aside all that prevents us from following you. Fill our minds and hearts with Your holy law, which is your love letter to us, that which comes from Your heart. And through Your Spirit, may we be in fellowship with Christ, that by faith, our fellowship will be consistent. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Neal D. Presa is executive presbyter of the Presbytery of San José*

Friday, March 14

Psalm 27; Genesis 14:17-24; Philippians 3:17-20

I tend to approach and teach the season of Lent as the Christian season of spiritual spring cleaning. There is something truly special about 40 days of engaging in disciplined spiritual practice so that we are less distant from God, and are on more intentional, intimate terms with God, self, and as Native American indigenous siblings put it, “all our relations”. The spiritual season of Lent is no different than any other disciplined practice. You get out what you put in. For me, the reward happens all Eastertide, when we can experience and celebrate the results of our efforts. Remember, Easter is an entire liturgical *season not just a day*. At Easter, we rise with confidence alongside Christ, knowing that the love and compassion we’ve cultivated over the past 40 days have made us new. This renewal empowers us to actively make the world a better place than it was 40 days ago, creating abundant opportunities for new life.

This year of our Lord 2025 has started off particularly spicy and is giving little to no indications of slowing down. With these unaddressed or inadequately addressed sins of inequality and injustice compounding and resurfacing at this terrifying present moment, it seems to me Lent is coming right on time. It makes prudent sense to take advantage of the gifts this spiritual season has to offer.

Today’s devotional is to be read and prayed over in a lectio divina style which involves reading the scriptures 4 times. The first reading is just you getting to know the passage. Second reading involves you focusing on the parts of the passages that are sticking out to you. Third reading involves a response of some kind, I highly recommend you start a direct conversation with God through speaking, writing, or drawing. After the fourth and final reading, take 5-10 minutes in silent contemplation. If your mind starts to wander, that’s perfectly fine, simply direct it back to focusing on the scriptures. This practice is also a way to lay the groundwork for a style of Christian meditation called Centering Prayer.

**Psalm 27**

**Genesis 14:17-24**

**Philippians 3:17-20**

**Close out today’s devotional with the prayer below:**

God, strengthen my heart with courage and remind me confidently that, even in challenges, Your goodness will prevail. I humbly ask for Your provision in my life and my community; I commit to receive only my sustainable share, so that others and the planet may have theirs. Transform my thoughts and actions, to reflect Christ’s compassion and consciousness in the world. Amen.

*The Rev. Annanda Barclay (she/they) is Temporary Associate Pastor at Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church*

# Saturday, March 15

## Matthew 23:3-39

In our Gospel passage for today, Jesus addresses the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. I can imagine other competing factions, such as the Sadducees and the zealots, looking over Jesus' shoulder as he said these things, shouting "right on!" All the while, they themselves were just as guilty and needed to apply these words to themselves. I am certainly guilty of this. We all need to heed these words of Jesus. No matter how mature we are as Christians, we are all hypocrites to some extent. In our proverbial forty days in the wilderness, this Lenten season, we need to pray, reflect and confess of this.

What convicts me most in this passage, is in verse 23, when Jesus tells them that they are neglecting "justice and mercy and faithfulness." The scribes and Pharisees would have believed that they were doing these things right. Are we? How do we ensure that we are? In addition to praying, reflecting and confessing, we heed the words of Jesus in verse 12 and we must humble ourselves. When we truly do that, we can be shaped by God's word, be led by God's spirit and we can truly learn from one another as God's people, the Church.

*Prayer:*

Lord, we confess that we are not perfect and that we need your forgiveness and your Holy Spirit to shape and lead us. Give us humble spirits so that we can be faithful and do justice and show mercy. We pray in the name of your son and our lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Rev. Jason Barraca is Stated Supply Pastor of Lincoln Avenue Presbyterian Church in Salinas*

# Sunday, March 16 (Second Sunday in Lent)

## Philippians 3:17-4:1

During this time of Lent, Christians all over the world are preparing for the Cross of Christ and then Christ's Resurrection. In this way, we are part of the family of Christ made up of different Christian traditions and denominations. Like this Letter to the Philippians, Paul considers these folks as family members; "brothers and sisters" who he reminds to live as he does faithfully as part of this family. At the same time, Paul is deeply moved even to tears for those who focus only on "earthly things." We can sense how Paul aches for these people who believe that Caeser is their "savior" and not the true Lord Jesus Christ.

As members of the family of Christ, then and now, we are not "earthly" citizens of a state or country, but holy citizens of heaven with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

So, how do these days of Lent remind us of our sense of family and heavenly citizenship? Each day we focus on the gifts of God, like grace, that began when God created the world and will finish with the celebration of Christ's coming on Easter morning. God's grace has brought us into this family, this worldwide group of Christians who are walking as we are and praying as we are for the forgiveness that could only come with the Cross of Christ on Good Friday.

Finally, Paul tells his family at Philippi, and us, to "stand firm in the Lord in this way." As we focus during Lent on our membership in the family of Christ, let us remember that God's grace and forgiveness are gifts that we as Christians receive because Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior chose to give His earthly life on the cross and rose in glory to save us all.

### **Prayer from the Iona Community:**

"Bless to us O God, The moon that is above us, the earth that is beneath us, the friends who are around us, your image deep within us, the rest which is before us. Amen"

*The Rev. Sharon J. LeClaire is a minister member of the Presbytery of San José*

# Monday, March 17

## Romans 4:1-12

God is truly unfathomable. There are stories of a vengeful God who sent a flood to destroy everything, who punished the Israelites time and again, had a whale swallow Jonah, and much more. Then there is God who created the world and all that is in and made us in God's image. God who justifies the ungodly and never counts their sins against them. This God is pure love. How can this be?

Several members of our church attended a Women's Retreat a few years ago, and one of our attendees was seriously troubled by the leader's preaching that there is nothing we could ever do that God wouldn't forgive, with a heavy emphasis on the word nothing. To quote my friend, "Some things are unforgivable. This doesn't seem fair." We talked about it on the drive home and talked with our pastor about it afterward. She explained that it's possible because of God's grace, a concept that felt new to me when I joined the Presbyterian Church. (I was raised a Baptist.)

We've probably all wondered how this is possible at some time. Fortunately, we don't get to decide for God what is and isn't forgivable. We probably wouldn't agree. We might have to form a committee. But what a blessing it is to know that Jesus came to live among us and to die for our sins. We don't have to be perfect to earn God's love and forgiveness. We get to receive God's grace each week during the Prayer of Confession and whenever we pray. All praise to God. God's grace to you.

### **Prayer:**

Loving and gracious God, we come to you knowing that we are undeserving and that your grace washes away our transgressions. Thank you for your sacrifice. Be with us as we strive to be worthy of your love and messengers of your word. Amen.

*Sharon Rowser is a ruling elder of Foothill Community Presbyterian Church in San José*

## Tuesday, March 18

### 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 has always been a difficult passage for me, because it is such a common passage for people to use to prove spiritual and moral superiority towards others. The passage starts by combining the foundational story of the Exodus with the sacramental language of baptism and the Lord's Supper. From there, Paul is laying out a "moral code"- exposing people's desires to embrace the idols around us, including relationships and worship. While we can debate and talk about that moral code, literalists and other people use this passage to create a theology rooted in self-righteousness or piety as if that was Paul's meaning.

For those in the Reformed tradition, piety is problematic, as our tradition is one that is based on faith and not works. More problematic than that is the misinterpretation of the passage placing the emphasis on self-righteousness over the decree against idols. Of course, that it is a very slippery slope because often self-righteousness becomes the idol, as self-righteousness put the emphasis of faith on one's actions and earthly rubrics, instead of listening to and seeking God.

For the 16th century Protestant Reformers like Zwingli, this was the one of the problems they had with the Anabaptist movement. Within that tradition, one could claim their own salvation. They were also required to live into the piety that tradition taught. The problem for the Reformed movement was, of course, the recognition that salvation could only come from God, and that given to our own devices we are going to choose ourselves over God. Subsequently, when we see ourselves as superior to others, we recognize that we are making our lives about us and not about God.

I think this is exemplified in one of my favorite faith-based movies, *Saved*. *Saved* is a 2004 movie provocatively written about a student who attends a Christian High School. The student gets pregnant after experimenting with sex with her boyfriend, who is trying to see if he is gay or straight. The story follows the teen as she struggles to find acceptance and understanding. Instead of finding people who embrace her as a child of God, the movie portrays judgement and rejection by the "Christians" around her, leading her to re-explore her faith.

For me, the most powerful scene is when her "friends" attempt to do an exorcism with her on the side of the road (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ij0JLKDJOrc> ). At the end of the exchange, the friend who orchestrated the exorcism gets frustrated at her and throws the Bible, to which the girl responds, "The Bible is not a weapon, you idiot."

Putting the extremes of Christianity aside, we live in very difficult times. What makes it worse is that everyone is trying to prove how they are right and how God is more on their side than anyone else's. The problem, of course, is that God's desire for humanity is not that we are always politically correct, or righteous, or powerful, or anything else. God desire is that we love Him and live into that relationship. Living into that relationship calls us to recognize that we are in community with one another and with Him.

#### **Prayer:**

Loving God, thank you for the gift of relationships with You and with one another in Christ. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Bryan Franzen is pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in San José*

# Wednesday, March 19

## Psalm 105:1-15[16-41]42; 2 Chron. 20:1-22; Luke 13:22-31

What is the power in an old story — told and retold again and again, always a little grander, a little greater, a little further from the facts and closer to the truth? For the Israelites, their story was everything. Again and again, we hear them tell it, pronouncing the names of its great heroes like a poem. It was Abraham with whom God made a covenant (Psalm 105:9), Jacob to whom God confirmed it (Psalm 105:10), Joseph to whom God gave a temporary place in Egypt (Psalm 105:17), Moses and Aaron to whom God gave liberation (Psalm 105:26), Pharaoh to whom God gave retribution, and us to whom God gave the story. The Psalmist begs us to tell of God's wondrous works, and the musicality of their words, their liturgy, opens our ears to hear it. To remember it. To repeat it.

When we read in Chronicles 20 that the Lord instructs King Jehoshaphat and "all Judah ... with their little ones, their wives, and their children" (Chronicles 20:13) to go before their enemies not with weapons or battle strategy, but with song and praise and the same old story, we might laugh. We might think this illogical, foolish, even dangerous. And yet, to think such is to misunderstand not only the power of the Lord, but the power of the old story.

The people of Jerusalem dress not in armor but in "holy attire." They walk unarmed before the army. They praise and they sing: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever," (Chronicles 20:21). And somehow, somehow, they are victorious.

The pen, we are told, is mightier than the sword, but the voice which speaks – which prays, which sings! - - the story which the pen has written is perhaps the mightiest of all. How else can we remind our brothers and sisters that the God of "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:28) is the same today as ever, and so will liberate us just as he liberated the Israelites so long ago?

I worry a lot about the great narrative of our days, about the way I hear people speak with despair as if the battle against tyranny, against war, against oppression, against environmental degradation is already lost. It's as if we go into battle saying "Well, we already lost the last one.. and the last one... and the last one! So why bother?"

What if instead we told the old story which is our birthright as children of God, which is our power? What if we walked through the narrow door of hope with the song of God's wondrous works in the air? What if we, like the Israelites, thanked God in advance for the steadfast love which we are about to be shown? Well, maybe it's illogical, foolish, or even dangerous, but I think it's the only way we emerge victorious.

### **Prayer:**

God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Jesus, and of so many named and unnamed prophets and people, today we thank You for the wondrous works which you have done which You will do, and into which You will invite us. May we remember the story of your steadfast love, and may you inspire and empower us to contribute a verse.

*Rev. Julianne Porras-Center is executive director/organizing pastor of Somos Watsonville*

# Thursday, March 20

## Psalm 63:1-8

*"I don't want to talk about hope right now. That may sound unchristian, but at this stage, we're just trying to survive and live day by day. The people of Gaza are finding strength in one another and in their faith in God. They know they can't rely on anything else."*

*I'm convinced that people undergoing harsh realities experience God in a more real way than we can imagine."*

*-Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem*

In a recent interview with Time Magazine, Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac (a pastor serving a congregation in Palestine) spoke about the harsh reality of life for Christians living under occupation and subjected to a violent war. He challenges a Western reporter's sanitized question about finding hope and claims that "people undergoing harsh realities experience God in a more real way than we can imagine."

During this Lenten season, we need not manufacture our own individual suffering as a way to connect with Jesus' trials on earth. We need only turn our eyes toward our neighbors who are living embodiments of the Christ who is persecuted by empire. There are whole peoples under threat of war and ethnic cleansing in Palestine, Sudan, and Ukraine. There are migrants in our own country being moved about as pawns in political power games. There are women, BIPOC, and trans folks whose bodies are being othered and harmed as they are scapegoated as the cause of all sorts of societal ills.

God! My God! It's you—  
I search for you!  
My whole being thirsts for you!  
My body desires you  
    in a dry and tired land,  
    no water anywhere....  
My whole being clings to you;  
    your strong hand upholds me. (CEB translation)

The psalmist calls us to notice and honor the faithfulness of all oppressed peoples who know what it really means to rely upon God. What would that kind of trust and dependence look like in our lives? How might that power enable us to stand up in solidarity with others?

### Prayer:

Compassionate God,  
Help me to trust in you more than in the powers of this world. Give me faithfulness to go forth and meet you as I hear stories of those who are struggling for liberation. May my Lenten journey help me walk Jesus' path of genuine solidarity with the poor of the earth, to whom you promised blessing and renewal of life!  
Amen.

*The Rev. Hardy Kim is senior pastor of Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church*

## Friday, March 21

### Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 12:1-4; Revelation 3:1-6

So much of our faith is more about us than about Him or about others. David sings the praise of God for what he has seen God do for him. He thirsts for God because His love is better than life. His singing will satisfy him as if he had eaten a great feast. David remembers God because of how God protects and comforts him.

But in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego it is not so much about what God did for them that makes an impression upon them. They are just the instruments of God to speak to a king and his advisors about the power of the Most High God. The God of the Hebrews protects His children in every circumstance. I cannot imagine the fear that must have overcome Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they were bound and thrown into the pit. But as they came closer to the fire, they felt no heat. They watched their guards burn to death and yet they remained untouched by the furnace. And falling into the fire they were accompanied by the son of God, as we all are when we face the fires of this life.

Yes, the comfort is great knowing that Jesus surrounds us in our time of trouble but is His presence just for us? Is He with us for the witness our life has for others? They see our peace in the midst of trauma. They cannot deny that we handle things differently because of our faith, our confidence that Jesus has our back. They are left with the lingering thought of how we have an inner strength that they wish they had. May Jesus use us to allow others to see His care for us so that they, too, might come to Him for help in the midst of their crisis.

Jesus says to the church in Sardis and to us, "Wake up, I have more for you to do." Thirst for God as David does in this dry and parched land. Do not be satisfied with a few good moments in worship. Strive to complete the life He has called us to. We will have plenty of time to rest when we join Him in the heavenly kingdom. But now, there is the work of the kingdom to do and He will walk with us through it all, demonstrating to those who watch us that He is God and there is none like Him.

#### **Prayer:**

Holy and gracious Lord, we desire You. Help us to live our lives after You, so that we may bear witness of who You are, that the world may believe and live in Your love. Amen.

*The Rev. Edd Breeden is an honorably retired minister of and treasurer of the Presbytery of San José*

# Saturday, March 22

## Psalm 63:1-8

The Lenten season invites us to join one another in prayer and reflection, letting go, caring for others - preparing ourselves for Jesus' death and resurrection.

Psalm 63 takes us through the process of experiencing our pain, remembering that our loving God is near, and as we heal, we sing God's praises.

I have been reflecting on thirsting for God in a dry and parched land where there is no water. With the death of my husband two years ago, and the death of my brother last year, I am experiencing this dry and parched land. I have been in a place where there is no water, and where I sometimes don't know how I can go on.

Maybe you find yourself reeling from the death of a loved one, a divorce, a diagnosis of a serious illness. In these desert times, when we are parched and there is no water, we wonder how we can survive. We come face to face with our grief, our body's weakness, our overwhelming sadness.

And then, and then ... we remember. We have seen God's glory, we remember where God has journeyed with us in the past. As we reflect on God's goodness, we remember that God's love is better than life. God is close beside us, closer than our next breath, loving us and tenderly holding us during our struggles and heartaches. Little by little, we are able to let go of the depths of the grief. Eventually, we are no longer parched, and instead, our lips glorify God, and we sing and praise God.

We remember. In the watches of the night, when sleep escapes us, when the pain and sadness are so very present, we remember that we are in the shadow of God's protective wings. We cling to God, and God's hand upholds us.

We remember. God has held us closely in the past, God is holding us now, and we can rest assured that God will continue to hold us in the future.

During this season of Lent, we are invited to share God's goodness and love and care with others, singing God's praises, reminding our friends, family, loved ones, neighbors, that God is also loving them, caring for them, and tenderly holding them when they are experiencing a parched and thirsty season of their lives. We share with our words and with our actions God's overwhelming love for each of us.

And so we move toward the cross during this Lenten season, preparing for the great sadness of Christ's death on Friday afternoon, and then Hallelujah! celebrate the resurrection on Sunday morning.

### **Prayer:**

In this season of Lent, may we seek God's presence more deeply and live in the light of God's power and love. Let us be thankful for God's faithfulness, presence and tender loving care. We thank you God for opportunities to share this great love with others. Amen.

*Lynn Viale is a ruling elder of Gilroy Presbyterian Church*

# Sunday, March 23 (Third Sunday in Lent)

## Isaiah 55:1-9

Second Isaiah and his community didn't know what was coming by way of geopolitical forces that would upend their world and life as they knew it. Our text begins with this invitation: "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters." Our text selection ends with this declaration: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

The Lord beckons all of God's children to come to the waters. Water in biblical history was associated with life but also with chaos and mystery. The deep waters, the unknown fathoms of the ocean and lake, the sea monsters which lurked beneath, the vast expanse that seemed to stretch beyond the horizon. . . the power of waves, rain, and the Noahic flood. All of this stirs the imagination and heart with trepidation, wonder, awe, and, hopefully, a healthy sense of humility. Respecting the power and awesomeness of water makes one be prepared when entering the ocean – paying attention to riptides, bringing the right surf gear, boating at the right time of day with the right equipment and expertise.

But more so, respect the power and awesomeness of the Lord of the waters, who invites us to come to the waters. When our eldest son was baptized more than 20 years ago at the congregation I served in New Jersey, Grace and I prayed afterward that wherever Daniel goes and whatever Daniel does henceforth, God has his back. As new parents back then, we had to put our faith into action and do what we affirmed at the baptismal water – that God declared God's love to Daniel and to all of God's people even before we have any full cognition of God's will and ways (which we often don't). It's recognizing that God's ways and thoughts are so much more than any person and any artificial intelligence.

God's invitation at the time of Second Isaiah, since time immemorial, and for all time, is for us to walk in the known mystery of the Lord's sure and certain love, in the Holy One's accompaniment with us along the journey of life and faith. Thanks be to God!

### Prayer:

All-wise God, whose ways and thoughts are higher than us, whose wisdom and love abides, and whose faithfulness abounds. Help us to trust in You and to heed your invitation to come to You. When we don't understand Your ways and the world around us, draw us to prayer and to all the resources of faith You give to us. And then call us back again and again to follow You. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Neal D. Presa is executive presbyter of the Presbytery of San José*

# Monday, March 24

## Psalm 39

As you read Psalm 39 or if you listened to it on a e-book, did you take time to pause at least twice for a period of time, like a few seconds or even longer? Did you see the two places in Psalm 39 that are intentional for you to take a breath, to meditate, to pray, to meditate?

If you didn't, return back to what is sandwiched between verses 5 and 6 and between verses 11 and 12. Did you find it?

The word: "Selah."

As the Psalms are a book of songs, all the psalms were put to song, sung in the worship assembly of God's people. When we find in places like Psalm 39 the word "Selah," that was a rubric which prompted musicians, cantors, and the gathered assembly to pause in order to consider the verses just before it.

The first Selah between verses 5 and 6 follows a lengthy confession as the psalm writer is humbled in the presence of God. The psalm writer desires to keep silent and hold the peace of the mind and heart when confronted with the holiness and majesty of God. The psalm writer puts it this way: "Surely everyone stands as a mere breath." (v. 5) Even with all of what we regard as human ingenuity, human wisdom, and technological progress, when juxtaposed to Lord, all of that is but breath. So, the first Selah calls us to be attentive to our humanness, to recognize the Creator-creature distinction, to see in our mortal bodies and finite minds that we live, move, and have our being in the holy God.

The second Selah, which carries us to the end of the chapter, invites us to consider that our hope is in God (v. 7), a plea to God to hear our prayer (v. 12), and that God have mercy on our foolish ways so that we may continue living with wisdom, having encountered God along the way.

Psalm 39 is an essential disruption to when we take God and life for granted, when we play games with God and with the holy commitment of following the Lord, when somehow we think our tongues, our voices, and our lives belong solely to us without any sense that our life is given from God, for God. For the gift of life and for every opportunity to life for God, we say, "Thanks be to God!"

### **Prayer:**

Incline Your ear to us, gracious and merciful God. We are but a breath, as You give us every breath we take. Humble us, that we may walk in newness of life, seeking You and loving You with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Deliver us from sin and teach us the way of Your Son, the Lord Christ, and by your Holy Spirit, enable us to follow Your ways so that we may testify in our words and our deeds of your gracious love toward us. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Neal D. Presa is executive presbyter of the Presbytery of San José*

# Tuesday, March 25

## Romans 2:12-16

Paul's Letter to the Romans is written to a church of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul has heard that each group has been posturing, acting as if their group is superior. Paul, however, is all about community and explains that for Jew or Gentile the hearing of God's law is not as important as the doing of God's law. He concludes this passage with the promise that Christ will judge all the same when He comes again.

Growing in our faith in God and shaping our beliefs, or spiritual formation, cannot happen when we are alone. We can read scripture and pray, both are very good, but spiritual formation is more than us and God; it is also us and each other. That is one reason why being part of a church community is so important.

As we hear the Word read and preached and sung, we share in the experience of God moving within our hearts and the hearts of all present. We are also accountable to each other. Don't we notice when a church member wasn't in worship... not sitting in their usual place?

Being in a church community means friendships, the kind that lasts a lifetime. When we are sick, these are the friends who bring soup or attend services when we have lost a loved one. For others, it means the power of a group to fundraise, go on mission trips, or spruce-up the church campus.

As we continue through this season of Lent, let's continue to read scripture and pray. Let's also ask ourselves, what does it mean to me to be part of a church community?

### **Prayer for community:**

Gracious God, Grant us the wisdom to communicate effectively, to listen attentively, and to forgive wholeheartedly. May our community be a place of acceptance, support, and encouragement, where we can grow and thrive together. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

*The Rev. Sharon J. LeClaire is a minister member of the Presbytery of San José*

# Wednesday, March 26

## Luke 13:18-21

"[The kingdom of God] is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." (Luke 13:19)

Many of us were inspired to hear the report of the Presbytery of San José 2024 mission trip to Peru. La Oroya is an impoverished area high in the Andes that also is one of the most contaminated places on Earth. The operation of a smelter for almost a century left the air, land, and water polluted with heavy metals. Residents suffered medical problems. Children had dangerously high blood lead levels. The land ceased to produce due to the infertile soil. Clean-up efforts had proceeded painfully slowly.

In the midst of this devastation, a modest group of mostly older women had decided to act. They had no wealth, power, or status. But they had a vision for reviving their land and their community. They began to plant trees on the hillsides next to their town. Trudging up and down the slopes, they faithfully watered and tended to the saplings by hand. After 20 years, they had planted more than 30,000 trees, transforming the once bare landscape.

What seeds can we plant to further the kingdom of God?

Every day brings new opportunities: Greet people with a smile. Let a driver merge in front of you. Offer someone a ride. Pick up litter. Be patient with a new cashier at the grocery store. Be forbearing to those with different political views. Live in environmentally sustainable ways. Tutor kids. Donate to people in need. Comfort the sick. Feed the homeless. Reach out to the lonely. Advocate for the marginalized. Pray for others. Share your faith.

This is not to be Pollyannish. The problems we face, individually and collectively, are daunting.

But as the women of La Oroya showed, small actions, done faithfully, can have a big impact. In caring for people and creation, we live out the love that God has first given to us, and we help to build God's kingdom.

An afternote: Today is the 51st anniversary of my father's death. I give thanks for the seeds he planted in my life and the lives of others.

### **Prayer:**

God, we pray that You would expand Your rule in our hearts and our world. Stir us to spread Your love wherever we go. Protect us against discouragement. Help us to remain steadfast and to always remember that our labor for You is not in vain. Amen.

*David C. Burgess is a ruling elder of Westminster Presbyterian Church in San José*

# Thursday, March 27

## Psalm 32

"Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. . ." (v 32:1)

At this time of year we are thinking of the price that Jesus paid for us. A concept of such a tremendous gift that sometimes is hard to comprehend. Sometimes it is hard to acknowledge our sin, even to ourselves.

The author of the psalm struggles with baring his soul before God. "While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For Day and night Thy hand is heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." vs 3

Then it seems he acknowledges sin, confesses and is forgiven in verse 5.

Blessed are we when we empty ourselves completely, of our wrong doings, our mistakes, our mis-directions, before the Lord. We are contented and at peace when we totally trust God. The state of being blessed, being happy is living in His protection, and finding no obstruction to that inner sanctum of calm where we can hear the still small voice, of guidance, of instruction, of wisdom. "Thou art a hiding place for me" ... You surround me with glad cries of deliverance" vs7

There is a very human struggle with asking for forgiveness, as well as giving forgiveness. Jesus said "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matt 6:15

Another message of the cross might be that there is personal sacrifice, pain, even inner struggle, in forgiveness. Forgiveness does not come cheap. Jesus sacrificed his life for us, redeemed us at a great cost to himself. Yet it continues to be hard for us to forgive ourselves and forgive when someone has hurt us badly. We have to sacrifice our ego, our pain, our victimhood, our self-pity, or our self-righteousness. Yet Jesus showed us the way to forgive. Even while he was on the cross. "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do."

The Psalmist urges us not to be stubborn, but to forgive "Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with at bit and bridle, else it not stay near you.....vs 9  
But " Be Glad in the Lord and rejoice, O Righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright of heart." vs 11

### **Prayer:**

Lord, may we be humble enough to receive your love and forgiveness more completely that we in turn might be able to love and forgive more completely. Amen.

*Denby Adamson is a ruling elder of Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church in Santa Cruz*

# Friday, March 28

## Psalm 32

King David's Psalm 32 describes the agony and sorrow of hidden sin, but confession frees the human spirit knowing that the sin has been covered by the precious sacrificial blood of Christ. After Jesus, the second most mentioned person in the Bible is David. We can learn from David that through forgiveness there is restoration. Restoration of our fellowship with God. Therefore, today we can approach the throne of grace with confidence.

The season of Lent is a time to reflect on Christ's sacrifice for us. For which we were blessed to bless others including families and communities with the message of salvation, forgiveness, and restoration.

### **Prayer:**

Dear God, we thank you for your unfailing love for every human being. We thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, which gives us salvation. Thank you for your church. We pray for your church learns how to seek forgiveness after falling into sin like David. We pray that you strengthen your church and give it wisdom in the precious name of Jesus Christ.

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El Salmo 32 del rey David describe la agonía y el dolor del pecado oculto, pero la confesión libera el espíritu humano al saber que el pecado ha sido cubierto por la preciosa sangre sacrificial de Cristo. Después de Jesús, la segunda persona más mencionada en la Biblia es David. Podemos aprender de David que a través del perdón hay restauración. Restauración de nuestra comunión con Dios. Por lo tanto, hoy podemos acercarnos al trono de la gracia con confianza.

La Cuaresma es un tiempo para reflexionar sobre el sacrificio de Cristo por nosotros. Por lo cual fuimos bendecidos para bendecir a otros, incluyendo familias y comunidades con el mensaje de salvación, perdón y restauración.

### **Oración:**

Querido Dios, te damos gracias por tu amor inagotable por cada ser humano. Te damos gracias por el sacrificio de Jesucristo en la cruz del Calvario, que nos da la salvación. Gracias por tu iglesia. Oramos para que tu iglesia aprenda a buscar el perdón después de caer en pecado como David. Oramos para que fortalezcas a tu iglesia y le des sabiduría en el precioso nombre de Jesucristo.

*The Rev. Stella Matusiewicz is pastor of Comunidad LatinoAmericana NCD in San José*

# Saturday, March 29

## Psalm 32; Exodus 32:7-14; Luke 15:1-10

Repentance is hard to do.

Why can't we admit our sins? What keeps us away God? In Psalm 32, the illustration begins with hiding from the Lord, keeping silent. It is like "when your bones waste away through the groaning and your strength was sapped away like the heat of summer." Sin can do this. This keep us down, away from the Lord and in pain. Either through feelings that we are not worthy or we are "too far away from the Lord," this silence keeps us from knowing our Lord and keep us from saving grace. All that effort to hide from the Lord just brings pain, shame, and guilt.

As the Psalm declares however, by confessing your transgressions, you allow the Lord's healing grace to enter your heart. How wonderful it is to be forgiven, your sins lifted, and your focus back into alignment with the Lord!

Again, in Exodus 32, 7-14, the Lord sees the Israelites sinning against God by worshipping idols. His anger grows and he wants to punish them. Moses intervenes reminding the Lord of his promises. Though they were the Chosen People, sin creeps in. They fail to keep the Lord in focus and at the center of their lives. The world gets in the way. Although we deserve his anger, the Lord promises to forgive and restore us through Jesus.

And this promise continues in Luke 15:1-10. Like the Good Shepard seeking his lost sheep, the Lord is looking for us and wanting to bring us home. Like the woman diligently seeking her lost coin, looking everywhere and thoroughly in the house, the Lord is searching for us. What an illustration! We have all diligently searched for car keys, house keys, our wallet. And this is just scratching the surface on how deep the Lord is seeking us. Jesus uses these parables to reinforce the promises the Lord has made. Repent and turn to Me! I'm looking for you. Come and love, and be loved.

### **Prayer:**

Heavenly Lord, like David hiding in his sin, we too fail to turn our eyes towards you. We fail to repent and ask for forgiveness. Melt our hearts Lord and surround us in the joy and strength that comes from a relationship with you. In Christ Jesus, Amen.

*David Heacock is a ruling elder of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Santa Cruz*

# Sunday, March 30 (Fourth Sunday in Lent)

## 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

If you were to describe yourself, where would you begin? Are you an engineer, a church leader, a nurse, a hiker, a musician? If you were to describe a colleague, would you say she is chic, or gay, or intelligent, or Black?

Paul says we are to look at each other with a different lens, just as our Lord doesn't look at his children from a "worldly" point of view. God sees us through the redemption of Christ on the cross, as completely new creations. The word for today is "reconciliation." This word is used four or five times in most versions of 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Dictionaries say it means to restore a relationship, or to bring previously alienated parties to peace with each other. No matter what our "descriptors" are, we need reconciliation with our God. That is what the cross means to us in this season of Lent. The boundaries between our Creator and our former selves, enslaved to sin, are gone. We are at peace! Forgiven! Redeemed! God "counts people's sins against them no more." Hallelujah!!

And so, Paul says, since we are recipients of God's gracious reconciliation. It can be possible for us to extend that same grace to each other, no longer counting our offenses against one another. Can the "right" reconcile with the "left?" Can "straight" reconcile with "homosexual?" Can the "wealthy" reconcile with the "hungry and the homeless?" Indeed, that's our job title: ambassadors for Christ. God commits "the message of reconciliation" to us! We are showing the love of the Almighty when we love all those around us without judgment or condemnation. We are speaking for our God when we see the spark of divinity in everyone around us, and don't value, or judge, them for any of their "descriptors." We can help to heal our world! How might you describe yourself? You are a reconciled, beloved ambassador for Christ!

### **Prayer:**

Good and great God, we thank you for using us as ambassadors to spread the Good News of the cross, and to share your desire to reconcile with our world. Please help us to do just that, and to love others with your agape love. Amen.

*Charyn Paaske is a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos*

# Monday, March 31 (Reflection 1)

## Leviticus 23:26-41

Do you remember Fred Flintstone? How the whistle would blow at the end of his work day and he would yabba-dabba-doo his way home. He was always so joyful and ready to be done with work and to embrace his time off.

In 2007, Tim Ferris wrote a best-selling book called *The 4-Hour Workweek*. Although his ideas may not be practical for most of us, they touch on a nerve with many modern readers and workers. In the Bay Area, there is a kind of cult of work. We call it “the hustle” or “start-up culture”. With the rise of remote work and technology tools, it begs the question: are we working from home or are we living at work?

In today’s reading from Leviticus 23, we see an extended section that explains in great detail all of the festivals, celebrations and “holy convocations” for God’s people to remember. While we do not need to get stuck in the weeds of exactly how best to keep sabbath, the main point is still important to remember. *There is a time to work and do all of the important “stuff” in our lives, and there is also a time to rest from our labors.*

In a way, a holy Sabbath day, and a holy season of Lent, is a reminder that our work is never fully done, and yet, we are called to rest. In order not to let work or productivity become the center of our lives, we embrace a counter-cultural way of life.

One helpful reminder comes from Rabbi Abraham Heschel who said, “If you work with your hands, sabbath with your mind. If you work with your mind, sabbath with your hands.”

In your life situation, what kind of sabbath rest do you need? How can you be obedient and faithful to the call of God, which is not asking you to “do more,” but instead inviting you again into a relationship that leads to a more abundant life.

I don’t know if you can really practice a 4-Hour Workweek, or develop a 4-Hour Body, or even a 4-Hour Relationship. But the more we make space for time off from the work of our hands and minds, the closer we grow to God, which leads us back out into all we have to do.

May you yabba-dabba-do your way into the space and grace that God has for you.

### **Prayer:**

Teach us your ways, O Lord. Help us to trust you with the unfinished work of our lives and to be renewed as we rest in you today. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. David G. Watermulder is senior pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos*

# Monday, March 31 (Reflection 2)

## Leviticus 23:26-41

We have good friends who observe Sukkot or the Feast of Booths. The family is religiously mixed. The father is Jewish and the mother is Christian. So they honor some Jewish traditions and some Christian ones, but always with a healthy dose of levity and a dash of irreverence. For the Sukkot celebration, they invite friends and neighbors for a potluck meal in the backyard. They pull out the same boards and old sheets and decorations every year. Those who are so inclined build the booth. Others stand around and comment on the skills of the builders. There is always a picture of everyone in and around the booth at the end. In fact, the pictures of previous years become decorations for future booths, so we can remember the good times of the past.

There is no effort to do things in accordance with the specific requirements of Leviticus 23:26-41, but I think they really capture the spirit of the Festival of Booths anyway. It is a time to celebrate the abundance of the earth and the abundance of love shared among friends, family, and neighbors.

I don't know much about the way this family observes the other ritual described in this passage: The Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. It's certainly not a big celebration. The text calls for humility and isolation and rest. There is a significant emphasis placed on rest. These practices and themes are the means of atonement for sin, or reconciliation between humans and God after the divisions caused by human sin.

Christian theology puts a lot of emphasis on the atonement that comes through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Some traditions only emphasize the death of Jesus as the means of our atonement, but there is much more to the work of Jesus than his death. His incarnation represents God's initiative toward reconciliation. His life and teachings are filled with reconciling work and examples of reconciliation in action. His resurrection shows us that reconciliation is more than just pain and suffering. It is also rebirth and renewal. All of this then points us toward not just believing Jesus did these things, but following his example by seeking God, making amends among our fellow human beings, and celebrating this new life together.

So it is all connected. Times of humility and withdrawal. The work of reconciliation. The abundant joy of this good earth. The fellowship of our siblings in God. During this Lenten season, may we know all these things. And don't forget to take some pictures.

### Prayer:

Holy Reconciling and Abundant God,  
You call us to seek you across the divisions we have created  
And to find each other as companions on the way.  
Help us be humble and be joyful  
So that we can experience all you have prepared for us  
In this life and the next.  
In your holy name we pray. Amen.

*The Rev. Tom Harris is pastor of the First Presbyterian Church Palo Alto*

# Tuesday, April 1

## Leviticus 25:1-19

Today's text is about the observance of the Sabbath and the year of Jubilee. The year of Jubilee is a super Sabbath when people were "released" from their debt or slavery and the land was "restored" to the original owner. Jubilee points to the ultimate Sabbath rest & wholeness in God's kingdom.

What does the season of Lent have to do with Jubilee?

I find connection in Luke 4 where Jesus declares to people in Nazareth that he came to proclaim the year of Jubilee. Then he makes a shocking statement: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing!"

Jesus came to release people from their bondage to sin and death. But it's not only a spiritual release. Jubilee is also about a "release" from poverty, enslavement, homelessness, and military occupation. To enjoy Sabbath wholeness and rest, the whole person needs to be released from spiritual, political and economic bondages.

Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection is the fulfillment of Jubilee. Jesus brought God's kingdom on earth.

### **Prayer:**

May we, as your church, continue the ministry of Jesus, proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor, releasing people from their debt of sin, and restoring justice for the poor and the oppressed. Amen.

*The Rev. Joe Sohn is pastor of Cornerstone Church of Silicon Valley in San José*

## Wednesday, April 2

### 2 Kings 4:1-7; Luke 9:10-17

It's an overused three-word declaration, but it's true. And because it's true and has been shown to be true again and again, it is overused. And it bears repeating because we all need to hear it, say it, receive it, trust it, and testify to others that it's true. Here it is: God. Will. Provide. God will provide.

The texts from 2 Kings 4 and Luke 9 drive home the point that often times our minds and hearts can't believe or don't want to believe because in the moment it seems ludicrous, near impossible, and so we do the spiritual side-glance, roll the eyes, release a breath from under our lips, or say that we believe while trying to figure out how to multiply enough loaves and fishes, or how it is possible that a jar of oil can keep filling empty vessels.

The stories in 2 Kings 4 and Luke 9 present the common scenarios of need, the appearance of scarcity, and the result in the end of abundance. In 2 Kings 4, it's a widow who seeks the prophet Elisha's help to pay her creditors lest her children be enslaved. The prophetic advice is a curious one: she's to return home, ask neighbors and everyone for any empty containers they have in their pantries, then she's to return home with those vessels and with the jar of oil she has in her panty, she is to fill those vessels with oil. Somehow, reading between the lines, her jar of oil is like an inexhaustible pipeline, as it continually supplies vessel after vessel, more than enough for her to sell, gain revenue, and pay off the creditors.

Then there's the familiar Luke 9 with the crowds who are hungry, the presence of a basket of loaves and fishes, Jesus's friends doubting how those loaves and fishes are enough, and Jesus took those meager offerings, lifted them to the heavens in blessed them and broke the pieces. Consequently, there was more than enough to feed the crowds and the disciples.

There was a season in our family life many years ago when we were newly married, new parents, new homeowners, and I was new to the pastoral ministry, starting as a solo pastor. The hospital bill after the birth of our second-born son nearly depleted our savings. We had to ration our groceries until my next paycheck, making sure that our kids' milk formula and diapers took priority over any steak or meat we wanted to eat. We also watched our expenses carefully. What we didn't sacrifice was weekly tithing. We kept to tithing to our congregation, even as a pastor's family. And to this day, we still tithe.

This is not at all a humblebrag about us tithing; this is a testimony that we have shared to our sons as they are living on their own, both in college, and them figuring out how to manage money and the pressures for living. We encourage them everyday to tithe their money and tithe their time to a local church or worshipping community. In the midst of college demands, it is important for their spirituality to not lose sight of those tangible ways to express our dependence and reliance upon God. And not that it's a transaction of we invest, and God will then provide. Rather, our giving is based on the promise, God somehow provides. In the wider sense, our lives are the vessels that are filled with oil, our lives become the baskets that are multiplied. And as a result, we tithe our lives for the life of the world, so that all may flourish, so that all may be fed, so that all who are thirsty may be quenched, so that all who are naked may be clothed, so that all who are held captive may be set free.

#### Prayer:

Gracious God, thank you for providing. Help us to give cheerfully and tithe continually. Amen

*The Rev. Dr. Neal D. Presa is executive presbyter of the Presbytery of San José*

# Thursday, April 3

## Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:1-7; Philippians 2:19-24

### Restored to the Original State

God's purpose in creating the world was to make it an eternal home for humanity. He granted eternal life—His own life—to mankind according to His divine will. The world and humanity were meant to exist forever. However, due to Adam and Eve's disobedience, they lost everything: physically (decay and death), mentally (selfishness—Genesis 3:12), spiritually (hiding from God—Genesis 3:8), and socially (conflict between husband and wife, between humans and God, and with nature). The Bible reveals God's great plan to restore humanity as His children, fully reclaiming the rights of sonship. Thanks be to God—before humanity sinned, the plan of salvation had already been established in heaven: "He was chosen before the creation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20), and "the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). To restore humanity to its original state, Jesus reclaimed everything that had been lost in these four aspects. "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). One day in the future, all that was lost will be fully restored again: "Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21). The plan of restoration (returning to the original state) is to bring all things in the world back to the way God originally created them. This includes the new world to come. The Greek word for "restoration" carries the same meaning as wholeness, improvement, and spiritual maturity—a return to the perfect life that God originally intended for humanity. This is God's ultimate goal for mankind. Restoration is a central theme of the entire Bible (Job 42:10; Psalm 80:3,7,19; 126:1,4; Jeremiah 29:14; Hosea 6:11). Now that Christ has completed His work of restoring humanity to God, it is our responsibility to respond to this gift of new life. We return to our original state by allowing Jesus Christ to transform us. Spiritual restoration begins with being justified by God—changing us from sinners to righteous ones, living "in Christ." Then, we undergo sanctification—God's work "within us"—to make us "perfect, as [our] heavenly Father is perfect." Believers will grow to be Christlike and receive the fullness of Christ, who will dwell with us. Eternal life begins the moment we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, and it will be fully realized when we enter the kingdom of heaven.

Restoration of the mind, God creates a new heart within us: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). God promised to restore both physical and mental wholeness to Israel. Today, He is willing to give each of us a new heart and spirit to transform our lives. No matter how we have lived in the past, God offers us a fresh start. Therefore, we should not cling to our old life, habits, or ways of thinking when a new life is readily available. Just as no one prefers using old, worn-out things when new ones are available, we should let go of our old ways. God has already given us new life, and spiritual restoration should not be feared. Isaiah encourages us: "Do not fear." Likewise, we should share this truth and encourage our brothers and sisters. Just as Paul affirmed Timothy's transformed life to the Philippians, testifying to his restoration through God, our transformed lives can also serve as a testimony to others.

### Prayer:

Dear God, thank You for Your Word, which reveals that you alone can restore me to wholeness. Please renew my life and restore me to my original state. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Prasartpong "Paul" Pansuay is pastor of First Thai Presbyterian Fellowship of San José*

# Friday, April 4

## Psalm 126

### **Lost, But Not Forgotten**

"Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy." (Psalm 126:5)

Have you ever been lost before? I mean really lost? Once, on a winter camping adventure with some friends, we snowshoed up a mountain outside of Yosemite, stayed the night in the snow, and then with packs full of our camping gear, we made our way back down—what a blast! But soon, in all of my fun and excitement, as they skied and I snowboarded, I became separated from everyone. Turn after turn in the deep snow brought me to a deep bowl surrounded by tall trees and heavy snowfall. Trying to catch my breath, I unbuckled from my board, took my goggles off, and realized I was utterly surrounded by the deep silence of fresh snow. In that absolute quiet, I realized I was terribly lost with no one to hear any cries for help.

Several hours later, when I finally climbed back out of the hole I was in, I could hear the worried voices of my friends in the parking lot below. I had been only a few hundred feet from them the whole time. I was cold and exhausted, but my relief and joy at salvation propelled me all the way to the parking lot to where my friends were waiting for me.

In scripture, we know that the ancient Israelites had been lost too. They had found their own way into trouble, becoming separated from God, suffering slavery and bondage as a result. To say they were alone and afraid is an understatement. But when God brought them back, their sorrow turned into unimaginable joy. Sometimes, in life, we find ourselves lost—maybe not in the snow, but in fear, uncertainty, or hardship. The silence can feel deafening, and we may wonder if God hears our cries. But just like in Psalm 126, joy is closer than we think. Even when we feel far from hope, God is working to restore us to him, to bring us back into His presence.

If you're in a season of longing for restoration. feeling lost, take heart—God is near. Your weeping will not last forever, and your joy will come like the morning.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, when I feel lost and overwhelmed, remind me that You are near. Even in the silence, help me trust that You are guiding me back to joy. Thank You for Your faithfulness and for the promise that sorrow will not last forever. Amen.

*The Rev. Trevor Van Laar is pastor of Gilroy Presbyterian Church and  
stated supply pastor of San Martin Presbyterian Church*

# Saturday, April 5

## Exodus 12:21-27

It is our natural inclination as human beings to want to be in control. We live in a time and place in which we have so much freedom, technology and agency, that we have the illusion that we are in control. However, once our infrastructures are tested through things such as disease or natural disaster, we realize just how fragile everything really is, including our lives. We realize that we are indeed, powerless.

In the Lenten season, we reflect upon our mortality. We come to the realization that we need a savior. From the dust we came, and to the dust we shall return.

The Israelites in the passage were not able to liberate themselves from slavery in Egypt. They could only be obedient and be completely dependent upon God. We have to be cautious as the church, that we do not give in to the illusion that we are in control, when it comes to taking action to change society and the world. We cannot do it on our own power and ability. Only God can do that. We are mere children covered by the blood of the Lamb. Once we come to that realization, that is when God will work in us and through us for the sake of God's purposes in the world.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, we need you. Thank you for saving us from this mortal existence, allowing us to put on an immortal one. Thank you for then working through us to bring your liberating message of love to all people. We pray in the name of your son and our lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Rev. Jason Barraca is stated supply pastor of Lincoln Avenue Presbyterian Church in Salinas*

# Sunday, April 6 (Fifth Sunday in Lent)

## John 12:1-8

Recently my husband and I visited the Legion of Honor Art Museum in San Francisco. While perusing some ancient artifacts, I noticed some beautiful iridescent glass bottles, about 6 – 8 inches high, labeled “Mediterranean, First Century B.C.E.” I thought to myself, “Oh, these are from the time of Christ.” The smaller bottle, more rounded at the bottom, was a shade of gold, with iridescent streaks of red, blue. The taller bottle, with a more slender neck, was deep blue, tinged with moss green and purple, making it look like a shaded pool of water.

These gorgeous flasks reminded me of the container which would have held the costly perfume of pure nard, with which Mary anointed Jesus’ feet. Nard is a sweet-smelling oil, derived from the root of the spikenard plant, native to the Himalayan region. Its fragrance would have filled the house. The scent of nard is said to be uplifting and relaxing and has calming effects on the nervous system, so it is used in aroma-therapy even today. In those days it was a rare and valuable commodity. It was probably no exaggeration when Judas Iscariot said that it could have been sold for three hundred denarii. Nard oil was used as part of the consecration ceremony for kings and priests, as mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures.

Where did Mary get this valuable oil? Perhaps she had been saving it a long time, for a special occasion, such as her marriage, or for anointing the dead at a funeral, as nard was often used to prepare a body for burial. In the parallel passage in Mark 14, Jesus says, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me...She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.” In anointing Jesus, Mary performs a prophetic act. She seems to be one of the few who realize that he is headed to the cross in a few short days. She gave her most valuable possession to honor Jesus, to proclaim that he was both priest and king, and to comfort him in the face of his most severe trial – torture and crucifixion. Perhaps Mary sensed that Jesus needed this fragrant, calming oil poured out upon him just before his death. Perhaps as Jesus went through that difficult week, he would catch a whiff of it now and then, and it comforted him.

What about your bottle of nard? What things of value are you keeping on the closet shelf, getting dusty, waiting for the right time to use them? Maybe you have a talent you could use for God or to help others, and you are not using it. Maybe there is some act of love you could do for someone who needs it. Lent is a good time for us to pour out our bottle of nard to help comfort someone, ease their suffering, or bring them encouragement. What are you waiting for?

### **Prayer:**

Gracious and loving God, You did not withhold from us the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. Enable us to see in Mary’s offering of oil, your invitation to us to offer what you have given to us for the benefit of others to Your glory. Amen.

*The Rev. Deborah Troester is pastor of Santa Teresa Hills Presbyterian Church in San José*

# Monday, April 7

## Hebrews 10:19-25

Last year I quietly celebrated 50 years of my ordination. There have been so many times through the years that the work before me seemed overwhelming. The task that I was called to do was way beyond my capabilities. Yet in each and every one of those times, somewhere I saw the hand of God coming to my aide and encouraging me to carry on.

One day I even heard a voice in my head saying, "Go anywhere you want, do anything that you think would make you happy. I will be there with you. I will make your plans succeed. But remember this, you have lessons to learn, and you cannot avoid them." I even tried to walk away from the ministry a few times. But my calling is in the church, surrounded by the fixtures of the tabernacle. God has a job for me to do.

My calling is to set up the tabernacle so God can make things holy for His people. Give to them a chance to remember the things which God has done. Encourage them with confidence to enter not only into the building but into the very presence of Jesus who inhabits the praises we sing, the words we speak, and the good deeds we do for others.

God has cleansed us from the guilt of our sin, washed us in the healing blood of Jesus, and given us the hope of a better way of life, here and forever.

As the author of Hebrews says, "We need to find ways to get other people doing good for one another. We need to gather together regularly to encourage each other in the things we believe." Faith is a journey of ups and downs. We need one another to help us stay focused on what we know to be the truth. And we need others to continually remind us of the greatness and graciousness of our God. He is faithful and will never give up on us.

David says that some trust in chariots. Too many times I see people trusting in their wisdom, or their possessions, or even their political views and their politicians. We have chosen to put our trust in God's words, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118:6)

Isaiah speaks the words of God saying, "Do not let fear control your thinking, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

### **Prayer:**

Loving God, You have freed us from sin, death, and evil so that we may follow the ways of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to daily trust in You and Your will, knowing that You accompany us through life. You are faithful, You are trustworthy, we love You. Amen.

*The Rev. Edd Breeden is an honorably retired minister member of and treasurer of the Presbytery of San José*

## Tuesday, April 8

### 1 John 2:18-28

By any measure and moviegoer polls, one of the scariest horror movies of all time was the 1973 film “Exorcist” directed by William Friedkin and starring Linda Blair. When I think of the word “antichrist,” that film and the scene of Linda Blair’s demon-possessed character spewing green goo onto a priest pretty much epitomizes that term.

Yet, 1 John 2:18-28 doesn’t just label the obvious caricatures like Blair’s character as “antichrist.” After all, when the book of Revelation describes in vivid detail the dragon coming out from the sea, the same apostle John was describing Emperor Nero. Nero, as with all of the Caesars, were not figures with two horns and a pitchfork. That would be too obvious, although the obvious portrayals of evil are pretty much hands-down “antichrists. 1 John 2:18-28 describes the imminent “antichrist” plaguing the first century C.E. church, and then how we might discern and therefore respond to “antichrist” in our day.

1 John 2:22 says that the “antichrist” is one “who denies that Jesus is the Christ” and the one “who denies the Father and the Son.” Here, the apostle John and his community are challenging Gnostic heresies that had infiltrated early Church communities. These Gnostic heresies used the right language – Christ, God, Logos – but misunderstood, misapplied, and distorted apostolic Christianity and the witness of the apostolic faith. Heretical teaching had to be challenged and thwarted lest the witness of the Gospel and the testimony of the person and work of Christ would cause the proliferation and dissemination of teachings that were antithetical to the Gospel and to the Judeo Christian faith. Such is the call in every generation of the Christian faith – to attend to the teachings of the faith, to challenge distortions of the Gospel, and to correct it. That is what we in the Presbyterian Church call “preservation of the truth” as one of the hallmarks of the so-called Six Great Ends of the Church.

More broadly beyond the first century, the term “antichrist” (the Greek is anti-Christos) is anything or anyone who contradicts or contravenes the person, work, and promise of Jesus Christ. Thus, this is powers, principalities, attitudes, habits, practices, systems, ideologies, theologies, thought patterns. . . in other words, it’s comprehensive in its application. Because Jesus the Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, the living God’s claim upon our lives and every facet of the world is quite total and comprehensive. That is why we confess in the sovereignty of God. That is why C.S. Lewis in his writings, particularly in the Screwtape Letters, disarms our assumptions about ourselves and others. Let’s not just point the finger at the two-horned figure with the pitchfork; that’s too easy. Let’s also not merely focus our attention on the bad actors around us, although we need to do that certainly. But let’s not leave ourselves off the hook and anything in us that wars against Christ’s reign and rule over our lives. For as we well know, the Church was as misogynistic, racist, and abused power and privilege for selfish gain just as history’s dictators and the world’s wealthy megalomaniac. The late Tim Keller wisely asserted: “The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

#### **Prayer:**

Loving God, thank You for your great salvation in Jesus Christ for us in the power of the Holy Spirit. Help us to embrace the truth and love of the Gospel so that all may flourish in Christ. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Neal D. Presa is executive presbyter of the Presbytery of San José.*

## Wednesday, April 9

### Luke 18:31-34

"See, we are going up to Jerusalem. . . ." Jesus told his closest disciples as they walked the dusty roads in Palestine. Jesus spoke plainly to them about his impending death and resurrection and how it was prophesied by the Hebrew prophets, but they did not grasp or comprehend what was described by Jesus.

We know that the disciples were Jewish men who would have known the writings of the Hebrew prophets and they would have known the imagery of the Son of Man. In addition, they also would have been familiar with the threat and brutality of the Roman empire, and they certainly knew the threat to all of them, especially Jesus.

I believe that the part of Jesus' statement that was most incomprehensible to the disciples was that Jesus would walk into that threat, would be killed and that somehow he would rise again. With our hindsight of knowing how the story ends, we might find it easy to deride the disciples as thick-headed. Instead, I suggest that we take their example of continuing to walk with Jesus. The disciples continue to walk with Jesus through the threat of the empire even as people who didn't have access to the power of force. In this tumultuous time in our nation, we might better understand their feeling of powerlessness and uncertainty. The disciples continue to walk with Jesus through the mystery of how one could rise after death. We all walk this walk of mystery. Even with the hindsight of our resurrection hope, we accompany each other in the fragility of human bodies and minds with some mystery about the mechanics of our own death and resurrection to new life.

In this penultimate week before Holy Week, we keep walking with Jesus. As Jesus called the disciples close to him with the invitation to "come and see" we can respond to that same invitation by reading the gospel accounts that lead to Jerusalem and walking with these words alongside other disciples.

#### **Prayer:**

Holy God, we rise up in praise to walk this Lenten journey with Jesus even as we carry the burdens of confusion, doubt and fear about our own road ahead. Empower us with your Word and your Holy Spirit and encourage our human bodies and minds as we seek to faithfully walk through our days. Help us to comprehend what you have for us to learn and do and help us to live into holy mysteries where your ways are hidden from our human comprehension. Grant us grace for those who share the road to Jerusalem with us. We pray in the name of the One who walks with us, our guide and Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

*The Rev. Erica Rader is stated clerk of the Presbytery of San José and  
associate pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos*

# Thursday, April 10

## Hebrews 2:1-9

I am nine years old, sitting with my friends in the musty basement of Moore Memorial Presbyterian Church in Tyler, TX. It is the first day of Vacation Bible School, and the teacher is reading Psalm 8 to us, the Psalm that we will memorize during this week of Vacation Bible School.

Verses 3-6 (King James Version because that was the only version we knew) stated:

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.”

And now, here I am at 76, reading these words in Hebrews 2, as the author quotes Psalm 8, and I am remembering the little girl who was first learning about God’s beautiful creation, and the surprise the Psalmist feels that God actually visits him, that we are crowned with glory and honor, that we are called to care for this creation.

During this Lenten season, we take time to reflect on God’s great love for us. The God who created this vast universe cares deeply and personally for each of us. We are called to pay greater attention to what we have learned of this loving God. We are invited to reflect more deeply on God’s word, in our prayer and our study, so that we do not drift away from the truth that we have learned.

Jesus, who was crowned with glory and honor, chose to humble himself and to experience suffering and death for our sakes. During Lent, we can reflect on our own response to Christ’s love and sacrifice. We can reflect on how this knowledge will live in our hearts and change our lives. We can ponder ways we can care for God’s creation.

The 40 days of Lent are a time of reflection, prayer and service to others. These verses from Hebrews 2 have several suggestions on what we might focus on during Lent:

- Pay greater attention to what we have learned, so that we don’t drift away
- Live our lives as Christ did, with sacrificial love, humility and service to others
- Do not neglect Christ’s saving grace in our lives
- Care for Creation

76-year-old me smiles at that little nine-year-old girl taking her first steps in this journey of faith - often getting things wrong, sometimes getting things right, and always on the journey to be more like Christ.

### Prayer:

Loving God, help me to avoid distractions and focus on what I have learned of You. Help me to remember to love others as You love them and to be willing to perform acts of service when I see a need. Help me remember to care for all beings in your wondrous creation. Thank you for this time of Lent to grow in maturity and grace as I focus on my relationship with you. Amen.

*Lynn Viale is a ruling elder of Gilroy Presbyterian Church*

# Friday, April 11

## Hebrews 2:10-18

*"Once lifelong slaves to fear of death, we have been sanctified and delivered to glory!"*

This amazing truth, which altered eternity for all those who believe, including my very own, was not without cost. It was not a result of a coincidental sequence of events. It was not achieved by random wizardry nor through a proud display of divine power.

Our Lord, Jesus, though he was in the form of God, made himself nothing, being born in the likeness of men. He was made like us in every respect - flesh and blood. Born a helpless baby in a lowly manger, he felt hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and sorrow. He suffered when tempted. He was betrayed, rejected, and left alone.

Yet Jesus was faithful in the service of God by becoming obedient to the point of suffering death on the cross - a punishment reserved for sinners like me. The Author of Life made the necessary sacrifice for our sins so that we might be reconciled to God.

That is a cosmic price paid - the lowly life and humiliating death of the Son of God - for the deliverance of His wretched creation.

And that speaks volumes of God's amazing love for His precious children.

### **Prayer:**

Thank you Jesus for your life and suffering.

Thank you Jesus for your faithful love to the point of sacrifice and death.

Help us to not grow numb to the wonder of your love and live each day in awe of your grace.

Amen.

*Blaine Kim is a ruling elder of Cornerstone Church of Silicon Valley in San José.*

# Saturday, April 12

## Psalm 31:9-16; Leviticus 23:1-8; Luke 22:1-13

Today is the Saturday before Holy Week.

Jesus and His disciples entered Jerusalem to observe Passover, also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Passover commemorates the day when all of Israel was freed from slavery in Egypt (Luke 22:1). To deliver the Israelites from bondage, God sent the final plague—the death of the firstborn. However, He spared the households that had the blood of the lamb painted on their doorposts. Those without the lamb's blood suffered the loss of their firstborn (Exodus 12). The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a memorial of the Israelites' hurried escape from Egypt (Leviticus 23:1-8).

At the time of Jesus, the religious leaders were so enraged with Him that they were conspiring together to find a way to kill Him, even during the Passover season (Luke 22:2). The chief priests and scribes plotted His death despite the sacredness of the season.

Similarly, in our lives, we engage with many people through various relationships. Among them are people with whom we share good connections, while others may make us uncomfortable or even irritate us for no apparent reason. As Christians, we have the responsibility to love our neighbors, even those who challenge us or cause us discomfort. Loving and embracing such people is part of what it means to live out our faith.

Jesus and His disciples had celebrated Passover together on several occasions. Therefore, it was not unusual for Jesus to send Peter and John into the city to prepare the Passover meal. This meal, closely tied to the Exodus, required the sacrifice of a lamb. Jesus Himself would soon become the sacrificial lamb, crucified for the sins of the world (Psalm 31:9-16).

Peter and John were tasked with preparing unleavened bread, wine, and a lamb for the Passover meal (Luke 22:7-17). They followed Jesus' instructions, and through their obedience, they were able to prepare for the Passover despite the challenges they faced.

In the same way, our lives are filled with numerous plans and tasks. Sometimes, these plans seem impossible to accomplish by human means. However, when we obey the words of Jesus and trust in God, we experience His grace and provision. This story reminds us that even when things seem daunting and uncertain, we can rely on God's guidance and grace as we move forward in faith.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, help us to live as Christians who prepare every area of our lives—our homes, workplaces, and all that we do—in faith and obedience to You. May we trust in Your word and follow Your will. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Taejinn Hahn is pastor of Daeseong Korean Presbyterian Church in Sunnyvale.*

# Sunday, April 13 (Palm Sunday)

## Psalm 118:1-2

*"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever. Let Israel say: 'His love endures forever.'" (Psalm 118:1-2)*

In a world where so much is temporary, we often search for things that last. Buildings crumble, technology becomes outdated, and even our greatest achievements eventually fade. Yet, there are things in this world that endure—mountains that have stood for centuries, oceans that continue their steady rhythm, and the love shared between family and friends that spans generations. These things remind us that not everything is fleeting.

But even greater than these is the endurance of God's love. Psalm 118 repeatedly declares, "His love endures forever. Unlike anything in this world, God's love is unshakable. It does not fade with time, nor does it waver based on circumstances. When everything else changes, His love remains constant.

No matter what you face today—joys or struggles, certainty or doubt—God's love is steadfast. He walks with you in every season, and His faithfulness never fails. When we anchor our lives in His enduring love, we find true security and lasting hope.

### Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your love that never fades, never fails, and never ends. In a world where so much is temporary, help me to rest in the unshakable truth of Your faithfulness. Teach me to trust in Your love, no matter what comes my way. Amen.

*The Rev. Trevor Van Laar is pastor of Gilroy Presbyterian Church and stated supply pastor of San Martin Presbyterian Church.*

# Monday, April 14

## Hebrews 9:11-15

### Greater Than

Do you recall this sign from your math class? >

Yes, the “greater than” sign.

That’s what Hebrews is about. Writing to the Jewish Christians tempted to turn back to Judaism under persecution, the author shows how Jesus is greater than Judaism. Jesus is greater than the angels, greater than Aaron the high priest, greater than the law and greater than even Moses, the greatest prophet.

In chapter 9, the author explains why Jesus is a better mediator of the covenant than Moses. Under the first covenant (old testament), the blood of animals had to be sprinkled on the mercy seat of the ark to obtain forgiveness for the people of Israel. But the cleansing from sin obtained through animal sacrifice was good for only one year.

But the new covenant was established when Jesus, as the high priest, went into the temple in heaven and offered his own blood. Because Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, his atoning death accomplished “eternal redemption” that guarantees “eternal inheritance” for those who believe. Christ’s sacrifice is so powerful that it frees not just people under the new covenant, but even people under the old covenant. (v.15)

What is pressuring you or enticing you to turn away from Jesus?

What is more valuable to you in this world than Jesus Christ?

During this week of Christ’s Passion, let us name our idols and ask God’s help to smash them.

### Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for purchasing our eternal redemption by your sacrifice on the cross. Help us to see that you are far greater, far more glorious, far more beautiful, far more valuable than anyone or anything else in this world. Help us to follow you without turning back.

*The Rev. Joe Sohn is pastor of Cornerstone Church of Silicon Valley in San José*

# Tuesday, April 15

## John 12:20-36

As we journey through Lent, we stand at the foot of the cross and ask: *Why does something so brutal and violent draw us in?* The cross was Rome's way of silencing insurrection—of saying, "This is what happens to those who defy our power." And yet, Jesus insists that the cross will draw all people to Himself.

The uniqueness of Christianity is not just in resurrection but in the cross itself. The ancient world was full of stories of gods who triumphed over death, but a crucified God? That was scandalous. Paul called it "a stumbling block" to some and "foolishness" to others (1 Cor. 1:23). Yet, it is in the suffering of Christ that we see the full nature of God—a God who enters into pain, injustice, and abandonment.

The cross draws us because:

- **It is for everyone.** No one is excluded. The cross says God is for you, no matter your past, identity, or failures.
- **It reveals God's nature.** Jesus's death shows us a God of mercy, not wrath—a God who would rather suffer than retaliate.
- **It offers divine solidarity.** In our darkest moments, we find a Savior who cries, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" and truly understands.
- **It turns power upside down.** Empires crucify, but Christ redeems. The cross exposes systems of oppression and proclaims that injustice will not have the last word.
- **It invites us into co-suffering love.** To follow Jesus is to stand with the marginalized, to embrace sacrificial love, to make room for all.

I don't know what you wish to see in Jesus today. But I believe that with God's good guidance, we are here, and the answer God has for you is to look at Jesus embracing the journey to Jerusalem and a Roman cross.

This Holy Week, may we behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. To keep looking at the scandalous beauty of the cross. Jesus draws us in. Amen.

### Prayer:

Jesus, Crucified and Risen,  
You have drawn us to the foot of your cross,  
a place of suffering, yet a place of love.  
Teach us to follow you in co-suffering love.  
Help us stand with the weary, the wounded, the outcast.  
Give us courage to resist the powers that dehumanize  
and faith to trust that love will have the final word.

Draw us again, O Christ,  
to the beauty of your cross,  
where mercy triumphs over judgment  
and grace flows without end. Amen.

*The Rev. Fred Harrell is transitional pastor of Stone Church of Willow Glen in San José*

# Wednesday, April 16

## Isaiah 50:4-9, Psalm 70, Hebrews 12:1-3, John 13:21-32

### Bearing My Cross

This is Wednesday, the midpoint of Holy Week.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem with His disciples to observe Passover, the shadow of death drew closer with every step He took. Jesus willingly chose the cross to save sinners. He entered Jerusalem to bear the cross of suffering, driven by God's love and power to save sinners destined for eternal destruction. Jesus, on His way to die on the cross, was the Suffering Servant prophesied by Isaiah.

The people's response to Jesus was foretold:

*"I offered my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting"* (Isaiah 50:6).

Jesus was not someone who received glory and praise while on earth. Instead, He endured harsh persecution and humiliation at the hands of the very people who had long awaited the Messiah. Yet, Jesus did not hide His face or avoid the suffering. He carried the cross of suffering with steadfastness and was crucified.

As we meditate on Jesus' cross during this Holy Week, let us reflect on our own lives and consider the cross Jesus wants us to bear. What does it mean for us to take up our cross today, in the place where we live and work?

Jesus endured betrayal, criticism, insults, and suffering with unwavering resolve and courage. Why was He able to do so? Scripture provides the answer: *"Because the Sovereign Lord helps me; I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame"* (Isaiah 50:7).

What does this mean? Jesus endured unimaginable physical pain and ultimately died on the cross because God helped Him and was with Him. The event of the cross is a historic and divine event, brought about through God's help, Jesus' sacrifice and obedience, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, in our lives, we face countless events—some joyful and happy, but others difficult and painful, ones we wish we could avoid. At times, we encounter hardships we cannot overcome on our own. In such moments, we can trust that the same God who helped Jesus will help us. We believe that God will not only assist us but also protect us from disgrace and shame.

This doesn't mean we will avoid suffering entirely, but we can trust that even in suffering, we will not be disgraced. Why? Because God, our Father, is near us and helps us as His children.

#### Prayer:

Lord, help me to live like Jesus, bearing the cross You desire for me. When I face suffering in life, may I trust that the same God who was with Jesus is with me. Help me to overcome all trials and hardships by Your strength. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Taejinn Hahn is pastor of Daeseong Korean Presbyterian Church in Sunnyvale*

# Thursday, April 17 (Maundy Thursday)

## John 13:1-17, 31-35

As people in the Reformed tradition, one of the most important theological understandings we hold is the sovereignty of God. To that end, we also uphold an understanding that to put oneself above another is an attempt to usurp God's sovereignty, and, thus, a sin against God.

While America was not created as a Christian nation, we like to think of America as a place founded on Christian morality. We embrace an image as our country being a great melting pot and a place where everybody is seen equal. Unfortunately, we rarely see a morality of equity or humility embraced. In fact, there has never been a time where that understanding has been embraced. Think about it: from our earliest times as a nation, we have seen a superiority, both in laws and moral recognition, given to people based on their gender, sexuality, race, financial status, marriage status, and more!

To make matters worse, we often reject humility to the extent that some people fear that being humble will lessen their power and status.

Many years ago, a group of clergy gathered at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office in Morgan Hill. At that time, there still was a relations officer between ICE and the public so we gave them a heads up that we were coming on Maundy Thursday to do a foot washing. As clergy, congregants, and politicians gathered outside, I and another colleague knocked on the door. ICE actually gave us a tour (it wasn't anything special, just your typical office with cubicles). On the desks were piles of folders, and, as we walked by, I couldn't help but say a little prayer for the people as I read their names. At the end of the walkthrough, we gave an invitation to all the agents to come outside for a foot washing service. Surprisingly, none accepted.

We went on with an inter-faith foot washing service, starting with then-Supervisor (now Senator) Dave Cortese washing the feet of a documented immigrant (for safety reasons no undocumented folks were there). After that, we washed each other's feet. The event closed with Fr. Jon Pedigo reading John 13:34-35 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." It was interesting as I looked back at the office and saw people staring out the window, watching what we were doing. I hoped that it meant something to them. But the reality was that it probably made no difference to the agents. However, it did make a difference to the undocumented as the media coverage got out and that community saw that there were people who would stand with them and cared enough to try and make a difference.

When Jesus washed Peter's feet, he changed the paradigm for those who wish to call themselves his followers. No longer can one claim superiority on another, because we are called to be in community equally with one-another. That means for those who have power and privilege, they must use that to care for and lift those who do not. They must recognize the equality of all God's children, and work first and foremost to live a life not in their righteousness, but in their humility.

### **Prayer:**

Loving God, help us to walk the way of Jesus, which is to humbly serve, loving neighbor and stranger alike. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Bryan Franzen is pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in San José*

# Friday, April 18 (Good Friday)

## John 18:1-19:42

As I read this narrative from John, I am struck by both the agony and the triumphant nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had already suffered emotional rejection of his disciple Peter, and false accusation in the presence of the High Priest, and the back and forth indecision of Pilate who allowed the crowd to condemn him to die, releasing the prisoner Barabbas instead of the King of kings. And he would die the most heinous of punishments, a crucifixion. It was the Roman way to inflict both humiliation in addition to the greatest pain imaginable. Reserved only for the worst of criminals Christ was believed to have been flogged with whips, stripped naked of any dignity and crowned with thorns that pierced his flesh. Then forced to carry his own heavy cross through the cobblestone streets of what we now know as the Via Dolorosa (the way of pain and suffering) to Golgotha (the place of the skull) where his hands (Or more likely, his wrists) and feet were nailed to the wooden arms of the structure, then lifted high and thrust into a hole. His clothes were divided and soldiers cast lots for them, fulfilling the scriptures. There was no relief for his hanging torso, as he would eventually die of asphyxiation, his lungs gasping for air as the weight of his body would sag and his lungs collapse.

But not before he carried out a moment of salvation for his new acquaintance on the cross, not before he relinquished his role as a son of Mary to the disciple John, not before he was able to receive his last hydration, wine on a branch of hyssop. When all of this was fulfilled he declared "It is Finished" (vs 19:30) and gave up his spirit.. Indicative of a sacrificial animal in the temple. His body would be pierced by a sword and drained of blood and water. There would be no more animal sacrifice, no more atonement, no more guilt and suffering. And to fulfill the scriptures, none of his bones were broken. (vs 19:36) All the sins we commit would be poured over his body, granting forgiveness and eternal life.

Gratefully, friends came to Christ's aid. A disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, loaned the disciples his unused garden tomb, and the priest Nicodemus, brought about 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes and wrapped his body fulfilling the burial customs of the day finishing before the Jewish Day of Preparation. (19:42) Thankfully this was not the end of the story. In the first century, a carpenter or worker stopping for the day, left a cloth loosely draped on his project to say that his labors were unfinished. But when they had completed the task, the cloth was folded neatly to say, they were done. That's what the women and the disciples found at the empty tomb. Jesus' sign to say that it is finished, the battle is over, Jesus had given up his life for us, finished the task.

### Prayer:

Lord Jesus, on this holiest of days, we praise you for your sacrifice, your willingness to take on all the sins of the world so that we might not bear our own. Help us to declare our inequities and lay them before the cross that cost you your life. Remind us to model our lives after yours, with sacrifice and love, declaring your wondrous resurrection. In Your name we pray, AMEN.

*The Rev. Dr. Libby Boatwright is a honorably retired minister member of and moderator of the Presbytery of San José*

# Saturday, April 19 (Holy Saturday/Great Prayer Vigil of Easter) Job 14:1-14

When a wooden table took a dramatic dive and landed squarely on my right big toe, I was pretty sure I had just experienced a near-death event—specifically, the death of my toe’s will to live. In that moment, the world as I knew it ceased to exist. The sun could have exploded, and I wouldn’t have noticed because my entire existence had been reduced to one singular, throbbing reality: my big toe was in agony. Sermon prep? Future plans? World peace? Who cared? Nothing mattered. Everything focused on the excruciating pain of my big toe.

When bad times hit, all we can think about is the hardship. The thought of hope—or even the belief that “*God is good all the time*”—becomes a distant memory that never even existed before. Job felt the same way. He wasn’t just sad—he was frustrated, desperate, and even angry with God. And who could blame him?

Listening to the full litany of his complaints, we might feel as if God had never been good to Job. He cried out: “*If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would appoint a time for me and then remember me!*” Job was angry with God for allowing his suffering—and understandably so. Isn’t that the heart of our own struggles too? When life crumbles around us, we wrestle with the same spiritual dilemma: *Is God really as faithful and reliable as we once believed?* If God is truly just, why does He allow pain? If He loves us, why does He sometimes seem silent?

It’s like Anthony de Mello’s story of the little fish searching for the ocean. When told the ocean was all around him, he refused to believe it and kept swimming, still searching. In our pain, we are like that little fish—forgetting that God is still present, still surrounding us.

Yet, despite his questions about God and his unfortunate events, Job clung to God—even if only by a thread as he expressed it in the last stanza of his prayer: “*All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come.*” Just like Job, we only demand answers from a God we expect to answer. We only feel abandoned by a God we once felt close to. So, while suffering may shake us, may it also deepens our relationship with the One who promises never to let go—to trust that even in suffering, God is not absent.

## Prayer:

Dear Jesus, in the midst of pain and uncertainty, we cry out to You. Like Job, we wrestle with questions, longing for answers, yet clinging to the hope that You are still near. When suffering blinds us, remind us that Your presence surrounds us—even when we cannot see it. Strengthen our weary hearts, deepen our trust, and help us hold on to You. For You are the God who never lets go. In Jesus' name, Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Vincent Arishvara is pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in San José*

# Sunday, April 20 (Easter Reflection 1)

## Luke 24:13-49

### The Mystery of Resurrection: Seeing Love

Jesus met two disciples on the road to Emmaus, but when they saw Jesus they did not recognize him. Jesus asked them what happened? They said sadly, "The women went to the tomb and did not see Jesus' body, but the angel told them that Jesus was resurrected! And some of us also ran to the tomb, but did not see him either!" The two disciples kept emphasizing that they did not see the resurrected Jesus, but Jesus was in front of them. It was not until the evening when Jesus broke bread for them that they truly saw Jesus.

Our human sin and fall have aroused God's anger and disappointment. This is our human condition! We are lost and without hope! In response to this desperate need, God seized the initiative and sent His Son into this world to die. As the British historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee said: "Of all religions, only the Christian God goes looking for people." Yes, if God didn't look for us, how could we humans see God? Hallelujah! It allows us to see the death on the cross and also allows us to see the hope brought by Jesus' resurrection, which is the love of God. This is an eternal love, and God's love penetrates into the depths of human depravity. One of the reasons Jesus was crucified was to be with people who were unacceptable to society at that time: the poor, the sick, the sinners. Bias exists whether it is racial, cultural, educational or economic. But resurrection love embraces all races, all colors, and all ages.

God treats us not with justice but with mercy. He reaches out and embraces the world because this is what humanity needs! Especially today, people who are facing many difficulties need salvation, because we are trapped in the dilemma of desire, the dilemma of broken family relationships, the dilemma of inferiority and resentment, and the dilemma of not finding the meaning of life. The purpose of Jesus' resurrection is to save you, because the power of His resurrection has already triumphed over the devil, as long as you believe in and follow Him. Then you will truly understand the meaning of resurrection and see "love" of God.

### Prayer:

Dear Lord, people continue to resent each other and families are torn apart. Wars still exist between countries. But through Jesus' sacrificial love and forgiveness, there comes peace and healing. It is also because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that people are reconciled with God, with others, and with ourselves. In the name of Jesus Christ . Amen.

*The Rev. Ting-Yin "Tim" Lee is pastor of the Taiwanese American Presbyterian Church in San José*

# Sunday, April 20 (Easter Reflection 2)

## Luke 24:1-12

According to Luke, the women went to the tomb when it was deep dawn.

Many translations say “early dawn” or “first thing in the morning,” but what the Gospel writer Luke is trying to tell us is that it was DEEP DAWN. Bathos in New Testament Greek.

How early is Deep Dawn? I suspect that it’s very early, so early that my Apple Watch, when it’s set to the Solar Graph face, would still say “NIGHT” and not yet “TWILIGHT.” I imagine that it’s when there is still no discernible trace of sunlight.

Retired Presbyterian pastor and poet Jim Lowry has a poignant description of Deep Dawn. He writes, “Deep Dawn is that indefinable time between darkness and light... that time when the promise in which you believe is true; or the promise in which you believe is a lie.” Deep Dawn is when our faith is tested. Deep Dawn is when we are so despairing that we cannot imagine any way forward.

And yet the Deep Dawn is also when our minds are flooded with memories. Sometimes the memories are haunting, but other times the memories give us hope. The women at the tomb are told to do just one thing . . . Remember. Remember what Jesus told you. Remember how Jesus fed thousands in the wilderness. Remember how Jesus healed people and stilled the storm. Remember Jesus’s extravagant forgiveness and overflowing love. Remember that Jesus said he would die and be raised again to life.<sup>1</sup>

And we can remember all the people who have been Jesus to us over the course of our lives. We can remember how Jesus healed our bodies and spirits—even if it wasn’t the healing we expected--and how Jesus gave us new life. We can remember the resurrection stories that aren’t always very straight-forward. I think of a friend who once shared how they got drunk and high on the very day of their baptism at age 50. It would be nearly another decade before sobriety took a stronger hold.

As we remember these honest—if not straightforward—stories of new life in Christ, we can say, with so many other witnesses, “I know that Jesus lives because he lives in me.”

### **Prayer:**

God of resurrection and new beginnings, we are grateful that you are with us even in the deep dawns of our lives. Flood our minds and hearts with life-giving memories so that as Easter dawns, we can shout, “Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!” In the name of our risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Rev. Dr. Jack Cabaness is pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Palo Alto*