

A Lenten JOURNEY

2026



A COLLECTION OF DEVOTIONS
VOLUME XXIX

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*The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily
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Introduction

The photo of the rainbow on the front of this booklet was taken from the White Strand of the Monks beach on the Isle of Iona in Scotland.

Last October, I had the privilege of making a pilgrimage to Iona Abbey with a group of Pastors and Spiritual Directors from my denomination.

Iona is a popular pilgrimage destination, known by many as a “thin place” or a place where the veil between heaven and earth feels particularly thin. People travel there expecting to encounter the sacred, the divine or the mysterious.

The day I took this photo, I was sitting on the beach reflecting on the week I had spent experiencing God’s presence in the beauty of creation, in the faces and stories of my fellow pilgrims and in worship at the ancient Abbey.

Since returning home, I have found myself wondering whether it is the spirit of attentiveness and expectation that makes a place “thin.” And if so, perhaps any place can become holy ground when we slow down enough to notice.

The season of Lent invites us into that kind of slowing down. It is a season of reflection, listening, and renewed awareness of the sacred right in the midst of our ordinary lives.

This booklet is filled with stories of faith from our Westminster Canterbury Richmond community. As we journey together through the season of Lent, may these words serve as companions and reminders that God meets us not only in distant places, but right where we are.

Blessings,

— Rev. Dr. Faith Fitzgerald
DIRECTOR OF PASTORAL CARE

HONORING OUR LORD'S VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

If you google the word LENT, you will read that the season has “biblical foundations in the forty day period of fasting and preparation seen in scripture, such as the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness before his ministry began.” We know that during that time, Jesus underwent self denial, as well as serious temptation by Satan. We would do well to focus our thoughts during Lent on this difficult test of Jesus, because during this period, Jesus set the example for what serious self denial looks like.

Jesus was the son of God, but he was also the son of man, and the temptations that he overcame were accomplished without supernatural power. This was one of the reasons why Jesus was the perfect man. He is the second Adam who would not and did not sin. His power to refuse temptation was humanly derived, qualifying him to become the sinless atonement for sinfully inclined humanity. Taking on a role during Lent can honor Jesus, as well as can self denial.

Perhaps someone you know is today struggling to stay on course to keep a pledge of sobriety, or struggling to keep to a diet to lose weight or wrestling with controlling a quick temper. To honor Jesus' perfect accomplishment, we could take on during Lent the role of advisor, or supporter or confidant to said friend, neighbor or family member, so as to be there during times of our friend's weakening will, helping them to stand fast during Lent. Oh what joy our friend will have in success. We will have facilitated our friend being victorious for this Lenten period, and maybe for good. To God be the glory.

— Harry Edwards, RESIDENT

THE PATH TO LOVING KINDNESS?

How have you experienced Lent, or other times of self-discipline and spiritual attention, during the journey of life?

In my childhood, it was all about finding something to give up. One year, I chose to abandon sugar in my tea and to this day I cannot abide sugary drinks! Later, as a teenager, Lent became about adopting a fresh spiritual practice; perhaps a special book to explore more about my faith or a resolve to pay more attention to prayer. I even attended the church Lenten program. As an adult, I saw Lent as a time to pause the clock on the demands of life. It reminded me to create more personal space in a life busy with family and career.

So what now, as an older person?

For me, Lent is a time to practice letting go. I can examine what I assume to be essential and ask whether the same rules still apply. I can explore not only what I might now discard, but also how I might feed my soul in these precious years. A time to consign old wounds and sorrows to the trashcan and celebrate the present moment. An opportunity to embrace the gift of life itself in whatever form it takes.

All, of course, is easier said than done.

But, by the grace of God, I can try and discover anew that this time in life brings new freedoms and blessings I could never have imagined for myself that I may learn. As Pope Francis said, “to walk (always) in the same direction, tending toward the same goal, attentive to one another in love and patience.”

— Sue Eaves, RESIDENT

Friday after Ash Wednesday

FEBRUARY 20, 2026

EZEKIEL 18:1-4, 25-33

PSALM 95

JOHN 17:9-19

SOUL WOUNDS

For Christians, the six weeks of Lent offer an opportunity to look suffering in the eye and feel it in the heart. It is as distasteful as it is essential. Doing this is a practice, a holy habit that helps us be more human and more humane to ourselves, others and the world. As we practice looking suffering in the eye and feeling it in the heart, we are preparing ourselves for whatever will be our next loss to bear.

Shawn McNiff, renowned art therapist from Leslie University (MA), addresses the importance of looking at images or symbols that we find distasteful or even repulsive. He believes that such a response indicates a wound within someone's soul that is crying out, trying to make itself heard. When we stop and take time to acknowledge the soul's outrage, there is an opportunity to explore what is happening at a deeper level. The soul wound humbles us and awakens anesthetized feelings.

I don't know about you, but I don't welcome this invitation. I'd prefer to stand at the door of Lent, say "Hello" politely to the one who has knocked and then slam the door shut. Enough suffering and grief already!

This is why I am grateful that faith traditions of all sorts have opportunities for us to dive deeply into what we don't want to face. Images, symbols abound in the Christian season of Lent that are hard to look at – a cross, human sin, confession and absolution, the crucifixion, atonement, penitence, lament, deep grief, disorientation, denial and deceit, betrayal, sacrifice. This Lent, I will take whatever symbols upset me into my art studio and paint them over and over again until I hear clearly the message of my own wounded soul in need of healing love.

– Hannah Anderson, RESIDENT

FASTING

One of the decisions we can make in Lent is to fast. This usually means abstaining from food or alcohol for a limited time and for a spiritual purpose.

Such a decision is easy to make but harder to observe, and it turns us in the wrong direction. In the Gospel account of his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus tells the devil, "We do not live by bread alone, 'but on every word that comes from God'" (Matthew 4:4).

Not by bread alone. Fasting is the time for taking on a harder discipline than giving up nourishing food or sweet or tasty things. Fasting urges us to take in the nourishment that scripture at its depth provides.

Two responses I ask of my readers.

First, sit quietly somewhere, and pondering every word, read Isaiah 41:10: "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you."

Second, ask yourself: "How then do I give up my fears or put away my worries? I need a companion for such a task. Fasting opens up a commitment: I need to come more closely to the God who says: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). Other satisfactions are not enough. The love of God is a banquet for us like no other.

Eat and drink this way in Lent and you'll discover yourself singing a song you have never heard before.

— J.A. Ross Mackenzie, RESIDENT

THE LENTEN PATH

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” Mark 1:35 (NRSV)

Jesus is seeking solitude. Mark, the Gospel writer, in his faithful wisdom, recounts how Jesus, even as he starts his day, seeks to be in prayer before the sun comes up. Fortunately, we know nothing more about Jesus’ praying in that setting. Jesus, like us, has very private moments. We can be grateful for knowing that he prayed without knowing about his prayer. We each have our path.

When we find ourselves alone during Lent, an opportunity for solitude emerges, whether before dawn, after sunset, midday or when we step back from our daily preoccupations and routine. The phone is on mute or airplane mode. The TV is off. It is then that I try to step out of my routine, even those conversations with myself, and into a place that is open to listening, slow breathing, taking in the stillness, shifting to a prayerful openness of the Holy One. A “deserted place” appears on the path and restores my soul.

— Bob Anderson, RESIDENT

ALWAYS BE KIND

We cannot change the world by a new plan, project, or idea.

We cannot even change other people by our convictions, stories, advice...but we can offer a space where people are encouraged to disarm themselves... and listen with attention and care to the voices speaking in their center. — Henri Nouwen

I opened the diary and peered at the tiny print. Five entries per small page. Mostly weather, who was home and visits to friends and family.

A photo filled the first facing page. Sitting in a great fanback chair was an elderly wrinkled lady. Dressed all in black from shoes to a heart shaped hat. And a shining face — my great grandmother, Nellie Irene Barnhardt. I knew little about her. She and my grandmother, Irene, had been deserted by her husband when the child was seven years old. Nellie Irene picked herself up and started a boarding house.

Almost a century later I'm looking at the writing under her photo, both added by another: "Her motto: Always Be Kind." My 20 year old self's reaction was Pfft! Is that all? I'M going to DO something. But through the decades her words would prod me a bit and expand in meaning. Now, at 82, they ring loud and clear. As simple as a smile for a passing stranger, I've learned, my kindness can create a space for others to be less guarded, more open and yes, more kind. I know that kindness from another melts me just a bit — or a lot! After all that doing in my life, having kindness as my guiding light feels like finally coming home.

Here's to you, Nellie Irene!

— Phoebe Antrim, RESIDENT

Tuesday First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 24, 2026

GENESIS 37:12-24

PSALM 45

MARK 1:14-28

“BE PERFECT!” MATTHEW 5:48

My mother lived with my wife and me for the last thirteen of her ninety-five years. A familiar pose was her sitting in her rocking chair, reading the bible. “Billy,” she questioned me one day, “why would Jesus ever tell us to ‘be perfect,’ when he knew that was impossible?” Not really having a worthy reply, I playfully answered, “He knew that we’d fall well-short of perfection, but he wanted us to aspire to the top tier. If we aimed for 100% maybe we could reach 60%. Had he told us to seek 60%, we might settle for 45% or less.”

Historically, the question about Jesus’ words in the Gospel of Matthew has troubled readers since they were first uttered. I determined to find a better and more serious explanation than the one that I had jokingly given to my mother. Bible readers must always remember that they are reading words translated as near to the original language of scripture as possible. The terms, “be perfect,” were those chosen by the English translators of the now famous, “King James Version” of the Bible to express the Greek word “telos” that Jesus used. In my modest opinion, there were other English words that fit the occasion better than “perfect.”

Several hundred years before Jesus, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, understood “telos” as “purpose,” rather than “perfection.” If we take it that way, then we have Jesus concluding his “sermon on the mount” by urging his hearers to pursue the “purpose” of their lives, to be what they were created to be.

Additionally, Jesus’ quote must be set in the wider Christian context of the passionately loving reality that we know as God, the one whose purposeful nature is love and grace. This is the one, true, God, “who leaves no one behind,” and who is a god who commands, and then gives to us what is commanded.

(1 Timothy 1:14)

— William E. (Bill) Blake, RESIDENT

Wednesday First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 25, 2026

GENESIS 37:25-36

PSALM 119:49-72

MARK 1:29-45

SING AND GIVE THANKS!

Growing up, I recall Mom humming and singing in the kitchen. Her sweet sounds gave me comfort and joy. Dad loved music too. On the weekends, the house was full of rich, musical sounds of opera and symphony works. My siblings and I were exposed to piano lessons in our grade school years. And in my teen years I was intrigued by the cello and guitar. My interest in stringed instrument lessons was short-lived as I began pursuing more interesting teen pastimes! That was the “gist” of my musical foundation.

Fast forward thirty years later. The church I attended was looking to increase membership in their choir. No audition was needed! I jumped at the opportunity for a new experience! I joined and have been a member of three church choirs since. I’m able to carry a tune, my humble voice serving as “support” to the total sound. Our weekly practice and Sunday hymn singing have allowed all voices, accomplished and polished alike, to blend together.

I’ve made wonderful discoveries since joining that first choir so long ago. I’m part of something beautiful and meaningful while learning about reading music and vocal technique. I’ve received gifts, not of voice but of connection and closeness to God. Singing hymns restores my inner peace. When happy or troubled, I concentrate on the verses in the hymn. Amazingly, my heart and mind connect to God’s goodness, grace and love providing me the opportunity for giving thanks and praise.

Much like our activities here, choir singing offers many advantages: enjoyment, reduced stress and improved mood. Singing sharpens my concentration and memory skills. An added benefit is a strong sense of community and connection: a recipe for a healthy life full of music. Thank God for “happy” and meaningful places!

— Courtney Clements, RESIDENT

GROWING

My wife has advanced Alzheimer's.

There are a range of emotions packed into that sentence. For my wife, she lives in the present and remembers the past – at least her version of it. She was a consummate gardener, museum docent, professor and board chair.

In her present state, she reenacts all of these, sometimes telling me what the garden needs, sometimes holding a meeting or teaching the other residents something.

For me, my emotions are more complicated. I have to meet my wife where she is now, not as she was. We used to laugh about the past, enjoy the present and look forward to the future together. Alzheimer's changed everything.

The disease reminds me that none of us leaves this life alive. In a sobering way, the Lenten season confirms this. The promise of Easter gives us hope in a better tomorrow where those suffering from diseases and hardships will be free from their suffering.

My wife's disease has taught me, too. I have learned (some) patience. I have learned to live in the present and not always be planning for the future, and it has taught me about the grace that others have given me, some intentionally and others unknowingly. Recognizing that other people have given me some slack during this time has made me realize my need to be more forgiving of others.

Would I wish this disease on anyone? NO! But just as my wife helped me to become a better man during our marriage, her illness is helping me to grow into a better man during this difficult time.

— Jim Edge, RESIDENT

EXISTENCE IS A GIFT

I woke to light I did not earn
a breath that gathered in my chest
like a quiet miracle –
unbidden, undeserved,
yet wholly mine.

The world unfolded softly,
each moment a small offering:
the hush of morning air,
the warmth of a distant sun
that never asks my name
yet still arrives.

Even sorrow carries its own grace –
the way it hollows out the heart
so joy can echo deeper
when it finally returns.

And love –
how it spills from ordinary days
as if the universe,
in all its vast and silent wisdom,
could not help but give itself away.

So here I stand,
a fleeting spark in endless dart,
learning again and again
that to simply be
is a gift –
and to notice
is its thank you.

– Glendon Kemp, SAFETY AND SECURITY

Saturday First Week of Lent

FEBRUARY 28, 2026

GENESIS 41:1-13

PSALM 55

MARCH 2:23-3:6

FAITH FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Several years ago, before the fire that nearly destroyed the Notre Dame Cathedral, my late husband, Bob, and I were touring Paris. We had only the weekend to tour the Left Bank, and since it was a Sunday, we decided to sit in on the mass that was being held in Notre Dame. Even though we didn't understand the language the priest was speaking, a wonderful feeling came over me.

I thought, normally we would be in our Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia, and here we were worshipping with Parisians and fellow tourists from around the world. I thought of the vastness of the Christian faith, and how much good we could do if we all worked together. It was an experience I will never forget.

— Gail Miller, RESIDENT

Second Sunday in Lent

MARCH 1, 2026

GENESIS 41:14-45

PSALM 24

JOHN 5:19-24

PRAISE THE LORD

I thank the Lord for my new place to live.

I thank the Lord for everything that I have
and everything I don't have.

I praise him anyway,

because I love the Lord with my whole heart and mind.

I give thanks to the Lord for my family, friends, coworkers,
and all of my WCR family and friends.

— Yovandel Perkins, DINING

DESCENDING GRACE

Hanging in my apartment is a three-piece abstract painting entitled “Descending Grace.” The first time I saw the painting, I fell in love with it. Its vibrant colors of orange, fuchsia and green foliage create movement that lures the eyes across the canvas. The brush strokes of the abstract flowers give them the appearance of floating in the air. If you look closely, you will see what appears to be doves descending from above.

As I meditate on the painting, I am reminded of God’s unmerited favor. Despite our unworthiness, He extends grace to us when we mess up and gives us another chance to make things right.

I think about how Jesus was nailed to that old rugged cross and what he endured so that we might have a wonderful life on earth. Scholars say that the nails with squared shafts were made of iron and were approximately seven to nine inches long with tapered ends. One cannot imagine the intense pain and suffering he went through. It is through his suffering that we are forgiven and are offered eternal life. Now that’s love!

— Bessie Taliaferro, RESIDENT

TO LIVE LOVE IN THE WORLD

I moved to Westminster Canterbury in February 2025. And, as I have been warmly welcomed by my neighbors and staff, I have also had the gratification of observing so many acts of love and compassion, occurring day to day, within our community. To live in a community where these qualities are of highest priority is a blessing indeed.

Today begins Advent. And I am contemplating thoughts to share during Lent 2026 with those living with me at Westminster Canterbury. These church seasons lend structure to the mysterious journey of love in the world to which I believe we are all called. I want to share concepts that ground me on that journey, whatever season of the church year.

There are three quotes that have and continue to ground me in my purpose of living love in the world.

Based in the Gospel of John is the phrase “a heart so full of love that there is no room for fear.” Whenever I have felt despair, confused, overwhelmed, self-conscious, these words have always regrounded me to a place of peace. Similarly, a quote from Don Matteo (fictional Italian mystery series) is ever with me – “All we have is the love of God. But that is everything.”

And attributed to Buddha – “In the end these things matter most: How well did you love? How fully did you live? How deeply did you learn to let go?”

I am quite sure we all have certain sayings that ground us in what we believe to be truth. I have shared some of mine and look forward to learning from each of you as we continue our life journeys together. There is much wisdom here. May God bless us all.

—Rebecca (Becky) Adams, RESIDENT

Wednesday Second Week of Lent

MARCH 4, 2026

GENESIS 42:18-28

PSALM 72

MARK 4:21-34

TWILIGHT

As I round third base and head for home, I find myself thinking less about the coming afterlife and more about the life I have lived. There are two reasons for that: First, I am more comfortable than ever in my belief in the existence of heaven, or something akin to it. Second, I find myself reflecting more on my life to date. It is said that to be old is to live in a house whose walls are papered with memory; to walk through rooms filled with the echoes of laughter, of loss, of things done well and things we would love to be able to do over. My dream of legacy dims, replaced by acceptance that what has been has been, and by the realization that my effort to change the world is nearly complete.

At the same time, there is a growing sense of peace, of confidence that what awaits me will be more wonderful than I can imagine. So my heart grows quiet, my mind turns inward and my soul prepares for its last great journey. I pray that my final days will be light, filled with laughter and song, in the company of friends. Let there continue to be forgiveness and gratitude. And in the last days, let my story continue beyond the horizon that we can see.

— John W. Bates, III, RESIDENT

GRACE I GIVE TO YOU

If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace. Romans 11: 5-6

Grace is a gift. It is given to us. It is acceptance and forgiveness that we did not earn. God is love and it is by grace that he shows that love.

Despite what we so often think, “I worked hard for that”; “I earned that”; “I’ve eaten well, exercised, taken care of myself all my life,” we are not entirely responsible for the good things in our lives. They are gifts.

Others have often done nothing to deserve the difficulties of their lives. The person who develops heart problems, cancer or some other malady may have done all the “right” things only to find themselves ill. We don’t blame the person whose spouse has died young, leaving them alone.

“For those to whom much has been given, much is expected.” So, I wonder how I, too, can share the gift of grace, to share the gift of love.

Where I live now, I have become accustomed to people with hearing aids, on walkers, in power chairs. Some are occasionally confused, and sometimes it may take a group of us to think of the word one of us wants to say.

I’ve heard people who don’t live here, and perhaps some who do, say, “that’s so depressing, living around all those old, infirm people.”

I flip that narrative. Isn’t it wonderful that we can get around despite our neuropathy? Can’t we laugh together at the group “word chase” instead of being frightened by it? Being surrounded by people, residents and staff alike, who accept us as we are is a gift. It’s grace.

Let’s take it upon ourselves to share grace with those around us. Let’s overlook the foibles and the infirmities. Let’s wrap those around us in grace, in acceptance and love.

— Marion Chenault RESIDENT

SOMETIMES GOD SAYS NO

Oh, that we could have the wisdom of age earlier. Lent has not always been my favorite time of year. I liked Advent much better. I liked being active rather than spending time contemplating the crucifixion and suffering of Jesus.

Recently, I have been thinking about the ways in which my faith has grown throughout my life. As an active church member, there were powerful sermons, Bible studies, Sunday school classes and the influence of fellow Christians from whom I learned. One friend I remember our group particularly liked, and we also liked who we were when we were with him.

I believe that my faith grew greatly through prayer. Like many people I pray daily for so many different things. I try to begin by thanking God for the myriad blessings he has showered upon me. There are always prayers for my husband, children, grandchildren, extended family, friends and for those loved ones whom God has called home. Then come many others whose needs are so great. Lastly, I try to talk with God with what's happening in my life. Sometimes when my prayer is answered, I realize later that the answer was not the one I wanted. Thankfully, I did know that the Lord knew what was best for me. Now I understand that the Lenten season is a time for listening.

— Robin Davison, RESIDENT

Saturday Second Week of Lent

MARCH 7, 2026

GENESIS 43:16-34

PSALM 75

MARK 5:1-20

LISTENING ... REALLY LISTENING

As usual, I was moving quickly through the halls to meet a friend in the garden across from the theater. Ahead of me was a woman walking slowly, supported by her rollator. Coming along behind me, walking at a fast pace, papers in hand...clearly in a rush to a meeting or appointment, came someone from the Pastoral Care staff. As they reached the slow paced woman, they greeted the woman by name, politely asked how she was doing, she responded, and they began to move on to their destination. But then they stopped, turned back toward the woman and gently inquired further as to what was causing her to feel so down. Their whole energy shifted as they quietly listened while she shared her pain. Her energy shifted also. When she was ready, she moved on thanking them, obviously feeling so much better.

They then noticed that I was unsure of where I was going. Taking yet more precious time, they gently showed me the door to exit to the garden to meet my friend.

As important as it is to ask someone how they are, it is even more important to take the time to focus, be present. Listening, really hearing what a person is saying, requires presence. It may take a little more time. Listening is an invitation to be fully present and respond in a caring manner.

— Kathleen Kenney, RESIDENT

GROWING ROOTS

I remember carrying much stress and anxiety during my chaplain residency at a hospital. With each person I saw in crisis, I seemed to be borrowing some of their suffering. I felt overstretched and underfed. “This must be the cost of practicing compassion,” I thought.

Then by grace—conversations with more experienced chaplains and time in prayer—something shifted. I started learning about equanimity as a companion to compassion. If compassion is stretching the heart towards another, equanimity is allowing one’s feet to root into the ground. Gradually, others’ pain stopped overwhelming me. I was learning that I can stand with someone in their suffering without being swept into it. I began to think of compassion and equanimity through the image of an oak tree: its canopy stretches wide, but its roots must mirror that reach for the tree to stand, especially in heavy wind.

Each of us is an incarnation of divine love, yet each grows from particular ground. We can sense one another’s pain and stretch our canopies toward each other. But as we do, we must root into the God-given earth. Being in pain or witnessing it can feel like being tossed about in a storm. Until we realize we are trees and we are rooted.

Lent is the Church’s season of rooting. It prepares us for the great paradox of Holy Week: The cross is both the greatest act of compassion (the canopy stretched to breaking) and the greatest act of equanimity (Jesus rooted in God’s will, even unto death). Lent invites us into the hidden work of rooting.

— Jay Morgan, PASTORAL CARE

GIVING UP IS HARD TO DO

When we get over the binge of Fat Tuesday, we confront Lent – the ancient Christian season of self-discipline. These days, that is often identified with giving up something we enjoy – perhaps a dark Dove chocolate with a glass of Oregon pinot noir after supper. But are such “self denials” enough, or are they too puny to outweigh the vast gamut of our human self-indulgence? Consider the excesses of the ancient gentry as Amos enumerated them – lolling on ivory couches, wearing purple and fine linen, flaunting their drinking bowls and gourmet gluttony. But even this list of potential give-ups for the rich is too sparse for St. Paul who was sharply focused on the “appetites of the flesh” which both rich and poor folks share and should constrain (or give up altogether). Such carnality was (for Paul) far more dangerous, and harder to control than tasty treats and luxury.

But is even curtailing all our physical desires enough? Is that it? Can we sail through Lent (and life) with our hearts full of resentment and mistrust? Of course we can’t; but being rid of such bad attitudes is hard to achieve. However, Lent is a good time to start.

Consider two bad mind sets: mistrust of all strangers, and confidence that revenge resolves every conflict. Now think about what the world would be like if we all loved our neighbors. Then connect the dots. That’s not easy to implement fully; but you could make a start right now. Every day of this Lent, tell yourself that God loves us all. Then ask “Can I help you?” every time you meet a stranger. Doing so would be two steps toward improving both the world we share and your own wellbeing. So start now; and don’t stop when Lent is over.

— James Hall, RESIDENT

WHY LENT?

Ezekiel 37: 1-14, Psalm 130: 1-7
Romans 8: 6-11, John 11: 1-45

We are now into our Lenten Journey and nearing the end of our Penitential preparations for Easter when we will once again celebrate the great gift of grace. The days, excluding Sundays, from Ash Wednesday to Maundy Thursday, mark our preparation for Easter.

But why Lent? C. S. Lewis said, “The Church’s disciplines, like Lent, help us see more clearly what God wants to give us.” We give up minor things to focus on the bigger picture.

Jesus’ resurrection of his friend, Lazarus, presages Christ’s own death on the cross and subsequent resurrection to eternal life. In our story, Mary, Martha and Lazarus are an alternate family to Jesus (just as many of us have alternate families here at WCR) and do extraordinary things—roll away stones, remove binding and face coverings. Proclaim him the Messiah. They are ordinary people like you and me.

Back to Lent. Why do we engage in penitential acts? To lose weight, be more observant of others or confess our sins? Penitence is defined as “sorrow or repentance for a sin against God which involves a resolve to reform.” It most often involves prayer—for others, for health, for friendships, etc. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* says, “prayer means nothing else but the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word and to accept it in one’s own situation, particular tasks, decisions, sins and temptations.”

Is the real purpose and importance to get outside ourselves – to discern a new path, to become aware of others or to realize he knows our needs?

Do we need to “be still and know that I am God?”

May we at WCR be an alternate family and assist others to be still and realize God knows our needs and will fulfill them.

Wednesday Third Week of Lent

MARCH 11, 2026

GENESIS 50:15-26

PSALM 101

MARK 8:11-26

DON'T WAIT

When I went through a particularly difficult time in my life, I hung on by telling myself that new opportunities would come along if I just waited patiently.

But one day, I heard a pithy saying from a pulpit that hit home: “This life is not a dress rehearsal.” OMG – this is IT – my one shot! I can’t mess it up and let the world pass me by while I wait for something better. So I stopped waiting and set out on an untried course that has taken me places I never dreamed I would go. Now in my twilight years, I can look back with great surprise, appreciation and satisfaction at the full performance. Thanks be to God!

—Penelope de Bordenave Saffer, RESIDENT

BENEATH THE HERON'S WINGS

When you lose someone in a way that you didn't imagine, you question the workings of the Divine. How could you take them away from me in this way? So soon? So unexpectedly? So tragically? You scream and wail to the skies, or into your pillow at night. You breathe. You heal. You try to find normalcy. You begin to talk to them, as though they can hear you still. Can they? Can you give me a sign? Where are you?

My tears are a river. I was having a hard day at work. I hurried outside to find a quiet moment in my car. As I opened the door, I noticed a perfect hawk's feather underneath my tire. I had been thinking about him all day. I start to open my heart to the possibility that he is protected by something greater than I could ever understand.

I started taking daily walks where I devote time to think about him. A memory passes through that makes me laugh out loud. When I look up, I see him in the gaze of the heron that watches me from afar. My breath leaves me when we lock eyes for a fleeting moment. He quickly flies away, silently becoming one with the sunset. I am overcome with a sense of peace; overwhelmed with emotion.

As I go about my life, I start to notice the herons living all around Richmond, as well as the murals, paintings and sculptures of them. There is an unexplainable knowing that this is it, this is my sign. I know I am not alone — that he is still a piece of this Divine web of Creation. D, I promise to forever remember you. I will always look for you in the winged things, my sweet.

— Emma Pittenger, RECREATION

IMMORTALITY

Each day, it seems, another loss occurs: this is the agony of aging. The loss of a dear friend to cancer; loss of agility; loss of a car; even the loss of most of my hair, once so thick it was necessary to thin it.

It comforts me to read William Butler Yeats' poem "Sailing to Byzantium," in which he contrasts youth with old age:

*An aged man is but a paltry thing, A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing For every tatter in its
mortal dress...*

The poet's quest to understand existence leads him to the eternal, personified in this poem as a form made by Grecian goldsmiths of hammered gold and gold enameling. Thus, he seems to say, that even though we age, the soul does not grow old, and each loss moves us one step closer to everlasting life.

The final stanza concludes:

*Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enameling
To keep a drowsy emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.*

Although I will not find this imagery in my Episcopal prayer book, the poem softens for me the agony of aging.

— Marty Glenn Taylor, RESIDENT

THE WATCHBIRD

On a brilliant spring morning some years ago, I set out to celebrate the season by walking a nearby outdoor labyrinth, but I was stopped dead by a large red-tail hawk (by her size, probably female), standing in the grass by the entrance to the maze. I wasn't exactly afraid of her beak and talons, but I worried about seeming to threaten her, so I froze. She didn't move either, her bright, dark eyes assessing me.

We remained motionless for several minutes. Then, suddenly, she took flight and soared across the lawn and perched in a small tree. I entered the labyrinth, thinking all the time about two things: The labyrinth is a journey, and a bird is a messenger, making sure I am respectfully following the right path. I reached the center of the maze and repeated my journey in reverse. As I stepped out of the labyrinth, the bird left her tree and returned to the spot we first saw each other. Now she was seeing me off the premises.

— Susan Settlemyre Williams, RESIDENT

Fourth Sunday in Lent

MARCH 15, 2026

GENESIS 48:8-22

PSALM 66

JOHN 6:27-40

CONNECTION | PETER 4:10-11

As I sit quietly in the meditation room on our campus, the three beautiful panels of wood on the wall crafted from the giant oak tree that once stood on our grounds, speak to me of my faith. In his book, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, the forester, author, Peter Wohlleben, describes “how trees are like human families: tree parents live together with their children, communicate with them, support them as they grow, share nutrients with those who are sick or struggling.” In them are seen the processes of life, death and regeneration.

As I study the wood panels, I see the imperfections – splits and dark places, reminders of my life and need for spiritual transformation. The imperfections even bring joy, because God accepts me as I am and loves me still and is not done with me yet. The branches of the tree provide shade and comfort in their sheltering arms, reminding me of God’s presence and comfort in the heat and stresses of life.

Trees are social beings and are dependent on each other. They are connected through their root system. Wohlleben says there is “nutrient exchange and helping neighbors in times of need” and if each tree were only looking after itself “quite a few would never reach old age.” In times of storms, the trees are there for each other. If there are unusually strong winds, the deciduous tree community stands together to help each other. As their crowns spring back up after bending with the wind each is straightening up at different times to keep each other from breaking. And like the pine and spruce, they even rid themselves of that which is not helping them. They shed damaged needles that don’t work well anymore so they have room for new growth – again reminding me of my need to let go of that which is not helping my faith to grow and giving priority to ways I can grow.

As seasons change, and trees adapt, so do the seasons of life, and God still calls me to reflect his love and be his presence.

Thank you, God, for the witness of trees.

THANKING GOD

Today we are in a quandary because of information overload. It is mind boggling and depressing.

Who is right and who is wrong is the question? Confusion, frustration and anger abound in a swirling tsunami of news feeds and social media indoctrination. It is exhausting.

I am NOT a Bible scholar. I learned my religion in Sunday school and by going to church. These were simpler times. There were no popular competing News “shows,” no internet, no bloggers or influencers designed to flood my mind with their ranting opinions and anonymous agendas. There was just Jesus and his message of love, mercy and forgiveness. “I AM the Truth and the Way” he told us. And, he gave us simple guidelines to live by. You ALL know these things:

The Ten Commandments

The Beatitudes

The Lord’s Prayer

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

He taught us what was right and what was wrong, and to beware of false prophets. He taught his plan for a good and righteous life to little children. It is not hard to understand. Perhaps it is difficult for some to do in its simplicity.

The practice of his plan requires a certain discipline in the need for self gain tempered with an attitude of selflessness. A difficult concept for some.

Nevertheless, if you drown out all the noise, the message of Jesus is still there. The TRUTH, as we have always known it to be. Jesus never advocated violence or cruelty, he NEVER declared,

“I am your Retribution.” He declared, “I am the way. Follow me.”

— Sharon Botts, RESIDENT

Tuesday Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 17, 2026

GENESIS 49:29-50:14

PSALM 97

MARK 8:1-10

JOY

Isaiah 43:19

“I will make a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert.”

We have been this way before.

How can we forget that we have trudged, one foot after the other, through the wilderness paths of fear, loss, anxiety, loneliness?

How can we forget that we had faith, made promises, practiced disciplines?

How can we forget that there were streams flowing in the desert?

We have been this way before.

We know where the journey ends.

We know there will be gazelles leaping and pirouetting, dogs jumping to welcome home their people, five-year-olds running to try every seesaw, slide and swing in the play yard before their hour's up.

We have been this way before. We know where the journey ends.

And every one of us has a “Golden Ticket” marked:

Resurrection Day

New Life

JOY

— Marjorie M. Clark, RESIDENT

Wednesday Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 18, 2026

GENESIS 50:15-26

PSALM 101

MARK 8:11-26

CONNECTED, ONE TO ANOTHER

Something happened to me in my early 50's. I began to like house plants. I like them so much that I went from four to around 20, and I love propagating more. I'm turning into one of those people who asks, "Would you like a house plant?"

What has me enthralled with my house plants is the life they bring into the home I inhabit. They cleanse the air, they provide a bit of green and they remind me of God's creation.

Life comes in many forms. And all life has its origins from God who spoke the heavens and the earth, the moon and the stars, the vast expanse of interstellar space, into existence with a word. We are all connected to what has come before, and we are all connected to what comes after. Life begets life.

Perhaps, just perhaps, one of those house plants is a descendant, a great (etc.) grandchild of a plant that grew in the Garden of Eden. Probably not, but it does make for a good story.

— David Curtis PASTORAL CARE

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

This was the poignant question I heard from a mother of two adolescent daughters in an ER room. She had just learned that she was now a widow.

We all have lost or will lose someone dear to us. Loving others assures one that grief will visit. We have choices in how we will respond. Our response will impact our own life and possibly have a ripple effect never imagined.

Consider Naomi: after losing her husband and two sons Naomi faced her own “what do I do now?” moment. Her choice? “One day she got herself together.” (Ruth 1:6 *The Message*) Naomi never knew the full ripple impact of her decision. Ruth would meet Boaz. Their great grandson would be King David – you see where this is going. Her response changed her life, giving her meaning and purpose. It would also impact others, reaching thousands of years into the future.

Acknowledge: It is important that we acknowledge our loss. How do we do that? Am I doing it right, too much, too little? There is no uniform way to grieve.

Make Space: One temptation is to ignore or somehow get past grieving. Grief is to be experienced and embraced not ignored.

Grief is not linear; it tends to be circular. It comes as a lifelong companion, not something one simply works through and then comes to an end. The grief we experience is an expression of our love for the one we have lost. Their memory will live in our hearts and minds forever.

One day we all face the question: “What do I do now?” Your choices will impact your life in ways unexpected and perhaps unwelcomed. Your response may profoundly affect your life and may have impact far beyond what you anticipate or can envision.

— Larry Johnson, RESIDENT

Friday Fourth Week of Lent

MARCH 20, 2026

EXODUS 2:1-22

PSALM 102

MARK 9:2-13

REMEMBRANCE

My father wanted
To share a special sight
We parked beside a gap
In the dry stone wall

Through the gap we saw
A path across the grass
Enticing us towards the trees

For many years he roamed
The bracken covered hills
But now he stayed behind
Lungs insufficient to walk
That short distance

Sunlight filters through the leaves
Shining on the bright blue scene
Beneath the trees
A sea of bluebells dancing
Gently in the breeze

Rocks with yellow lichen
Enclose a sheltered beach
Sunlight filtered through the water
Dances on the gravel bed.
The hills my father roamed
Rise up across the lake

We savor the wondrous sights
Grateful for Dad's urging
Sad that he is not present
Foretaste of a reality to come

— Adrian Luxmoore, RESIDENT

THE BLESSING OF FRIENDS WHO INSPIRE US

Sometimes God brings people into our lives that inspire and motivate us to persevere and live more fully. This happened to me when I befriended a couple who recently moved to Westminster Canterbury. Both have been blind since birth.

After they met at Georgetown University, he encouraged her to try skiing by “letting God guide them.” And that’s when the adventures began. For 53 years they lived in Arlington, Virginia, while raising two sighted daughters and working for the U.S. government. Their vacations have been spent taking cross-country ski trips across the U.S. and Europe.

This extraordinary couple lives independently. She prepares breakfast and lunch using an oven and microwave. They navigate this large and complex retirement facility with the help of their 12 year-old service dog, Panko. With the help of technology, another God-given tool, they continue to explore uncharted waters.

Every two weeks I have the privilege of reading *The Canterbury Tales* to them, because they are interested in all of the activities, particularly theatre performances. If they want to attend a show, I escort them with Panko to a reserved section where he can stretch out in front of them. During the performance, she knits scarves for her church.

Wow! When I think of these truly inspiring friends, I am reminded of Romans 8:31: *If God is for us, who can be against us.* I also thank the good Lord in his wisdom for bringing us together. Through our friendship I have found new purpose and a more fulfilling life.

— Jane Neer, RESIDENT

HOW HARD IT IS TO WAIT

Do you sometimes think you have spent half your life waiting for something or somebody? Is it hard for you to wait? I find it a challenge. For example, when I am expecting a delivery at a set time and the truck doesn't show up, it seems time is not moving and I become restless because I can't move on to the next thing I have to do. When I am waiting for family to arrive and it seems as if something must have happened because they are not at the door yet, I become anxious. Then there is waiting for a report that tells me I don't have to see the doctor for another year, and I'm told it will be a few more hours that I have to wait. I have things to do.

It has taken me most of my life to learn I am not in control. Only recently have I begun to recognize that being patient is truly a gift. Waiting is an opportunity to be still, an invitation to stop, breathe, look around, listen. Henry Nouwen calls it active waiting, being fully present to the "moment with conviction that something is happening where we are and we want to be present for it."

In this season of Lent, we are reminded in scripture that Jesus knew how to wait, but when the disciples were asked to wait with him the night before his death, they fell asleep. They missed being present; they missed the moment. How many times have I missed being present for others or being present, waiting for myself?

If we practice the "spirituality of waiting" as Nouwen calls it, we open ourselves to an expectation that something new will happen. This waiting is not passive; it is not just waiting for God, it is participating "in God's own waiting for us, coming to share in God's love."

— Kay Remick, RESIDENT

Monday Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 23, 2026

EXODUS 4:10-20, 27-31

PSALM 31

MARK 9:30-41

TIME MOVES US ALONG

I sat on a big rock and listened to the falling water. I was completely alone, not a soul in sight. It was the prettiest day – chilly, but not too cold, and the leaves were changing color from dark greens to brown, gold and red. They were drying out and began falling to the ground from the trees that held them and nourished them. The moving water and the changing leaves made me think about time. Like it or not, time keeps moving. The changing seasons are constantly reminding us of that. I also thought about the things which have fed and nourished me for a season, and then like the leaves, it is time to let go, or like the rushing water, to get moving! Time has a way of pushing us along, and if we let it, it can transform us. I'm grateful for the way that the Divine shows up in nature to offer Her gentle guidance, wisdom, and grace. May God always give me an open heart to receive change and growth as time marches on.

— Logan Taylor, PASTORAL CARE

CHURCH CALL

Thud, thud, thud against the wall; the senior ranking officer issued Church Call from his cell to the cells, cell through cell, of the prisons in North Vietnam. The same happened every Sunday in every prison as the Navy, Marine, Air Force and Army – officer, pilot and aircrew, bowed his head for prayer. Each had his own private service, or if he was lucky, shared the devotion, words and maybe music, with cellmates. But quietly if guards might be anywhere around. If caught communicating, the punishment was severe: torture. Maybe hung from a ceiling beam hook while wrapped in ropes with arms tied behind his back until his shoulder blades touched and his arms became black from lack of blood. Maybe made to sit on a small stool for hours and hours on end, with arms and legs bound. Church Call was important – very important.

As one former inmate remembered, no atheists survived their extended military tour in the prisons of North Vietnam. They had to have faith. Faith in their country. Faith in each other. Faith in their God. The God that would see them through and see them home. The God who carried each of them. GBU (God Bless You).

— Paul E. Galanti & Karen Z. Alcorn, RESIDENTS

Wednesday Fifth Week of Lent

MARCH 25, 2026

EXODUS 7:8-24
PSALM 119:145-176
MARK 10:1-16

WHEN I WAS LITTLE

When I was little, our housekeeper died. My parents asked me if I wanted to go to her service. I don't know why, but I said no. I was not sure what went on at a funeral, but I really didn't want to go. My parents explained that a funeral could be sad, but often beautiful and inspiring. But I was adamant. What if I had to see Lena in the casket! So I stayed home.

And I didn't go to any funeral until my father died when I was 34 years old. Of course, I was expected to go to this funeral, but my mother was concerned. She was afraid that I might not be able to get through the service without crying. I was a little concerned, too, as I was very close to my father, but I came through it because my brother was holding my hand.

Through the years I have been to many funerals. But my perspective has changed. I am sad, but I realize that the person who died is no longer suffering and has gone to a better place. A memorial service is a wonderful time to grieve the loss and say a final goodbye. It brings peace to my soul. And I love the hymns that are sung at funerals.

When my spiritual journey is over, I hope my friends will realize I am in heaven singing "I've got peace like a river in my soul."

— Jean Bear, RESIDENT

SACRED ACTS OF CARE: A LENTEN DEVOTION

Caregiving has been on my heart a lot this year. The beauty in it, the moments that stop you in your tracks, and also the deep, quiet challenges that come with walking alongside someone who depends on you. A recent PBS documentary on caregiving brought so many of these realities to the surface for me. It captured both the ache and the tenderness of caring for someone you love, and it reminded me how often caregivers move through their days unseen. As Lent begins, I find myself thinking about all of this more intentionally.

Lent is a season for reflection, an invitation to notice how God's love is at work in our lives. Caregiving offers a living example of that love. Those who care for an aging parent, support a spouse through illness, or tend to a child's daily needs embody the same steady, compassionate presence that Lent encourages us to recognize. Their everyday acts of showing up, helping, listening and comforting mirror the patient and self-giving love Christ showed throughout his life.

This Lent, I want to especially hold caregivers in mind and in prayer. Their work is often unseen, yet it shapes lives in profound ways.

As we make our way toward Easter, may we remember that every act of care is sacred. In lifting others up, caregivers reflect the heart of God. And in moments of weariness or doubt, may they find rest and strength in knowing that their love makes a difference.

This season, as we remember Christ's journey, may we also honor the journeys of those who quietly carry the daily crosses of caregiving. May we be reminded that every act of care, no matter how small, participates in God's work of renewing and restoring the world.

— Jessica Corbitt, WESTMINSTER CANTERBURY FOUNDATION

THE POTTER

As young children, my sister and I played with paper dolls. Her dolls were always beautiful, cut out perfectly and the paper clothing fit just right. Mine, on the other hand, might have an arm or leg cut off and the clothes never fit. Obviously, she had much better eye-hand coordination. I tried sewing, crocheting and needlepoint. It took me years to complete one needlepoint stool. Thus, I decided I had no talent.

Once married, my husband Mac and I spent our time making a living and raising a family. There was no time for hobbies. A little over four years ago we moved here. I saw in *The Tales* that a pottery class was being offered and I signed up.

One day, I made what I considered the perfect tray. It did not wobble, the edges had no dips, and it was ready to be fired. As I began to place it on the cart for firing, it broke into two big pieces. I placed it on my shelf for my instructor to see and it broke into a zillion pieces. I felt sick and the thought occurred to me that this new adventure was not going to work either.

To quit pottery because one piece was a failure would have admitted defeat. Thankfully our God does not leave things unresolved. In Isaiah 64:8, he states we are the clay, and he is our potter. We are the work of his hand. He molds and forms us. In Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah is instructed to go to the potter's house. Upon arrival he found the vessel the potter was making was spoiled, so the potter reworked it into another vessel. The question then arises, "Can God not do with us what the potter did with the clay?" There are times when life overwhelms. There are times when we make mistakes, but God is always with us. He will never leave or forsake us. He has created each of us the way he wants us to be. We are the masterpiece that he will complete.

I have continued pottery, find much joy in my new hobby (most of the time) and take the successes and failures as they come. But I will never give up. Thanks be to God.

A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing. — George Bernard Shaw

POWER IN THE SPOKEN WORD

The Bible tells us to watch the words that we speak. In Numbers 13, God tells Joshua to send twelve spies into the land of Canaan to assess their strength. Joshua and Caleb were among the twelve. When Joshua and Caleb came back to the children of Israel with a good report, that it was a land of milk and honey, to come and conquer, the other ten spies came back with a negative report.

The children of Israel were standing on the border of the promised land, moaning, complaining and saying, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt. Or if we had died in this wilderness." God's response:

Numbers 14:28-29, "Say to them, as surely as I live, says the Lord, just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you; the carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in the wilderness, except Joshua and Caleb. You can have what you say."

Romans 10:8-10, "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." You will never regret verbally inviting Jesus to come into your heart and rule and reign in your life. That is the only ticket to heaven. Just going to church is not the ticket to heaven.

You have seen God's response to negative words. Begin speaking, and praying positive words for you, your family and our nation, and sit back and see God's response to your positive words.

— Anne Lewis, RESIDENT

HOLDING SOMEONE'S PAIN

As each week passed in the hospital in Syracuse, there were more and more tests. More experimental treatments. More fevers spiking to 105. More laying on ice filled mattresses to bring it down. The cycle was intermittent, unpredictable, exhausting. As the fevers rose, my platelet counts dropped. After weeks without answers, what likely began as the flu had become a severe flare of the lupus I'd been living with for more than a decade. At twenty-seven, my body was, yet again, attacking itself.

Syracuse was my hometown, but I'd made a home an hour away, in Ithaca. An hour in good weather, not in the middle of winter. My Ithaca friends tended to visit in groups, seizing breaks from the snowy weather. Seeing them bolstered my spirits with news or gossip from the library, but the large number of people often left me drained.

One evening, a young undergraduate I'd befriended came to visit by himself. The one-on-one was less boisterous, more measured. Humming hospital sounds created a kind of white noise, cocooning the words between us, undisturbed. The conversation was unhurried, with talk of his classes and careful questions about my new day-to-day routine.

And yet more was exchanged during the intermittent and, as the visit went on, longer silences. Until he began speaking again, hesitated, and then, choking on his words asked, "You're going to get better... aren't you?" While I'd asked myself this question many times, no one else had thought – dared? – to. I could feel him holding my pain. I let the silence linger a bit more before looking up from my bed. My eyes likely spoke before any sound of my voice.

"I don't know."

Letting out those words of uncertainty I was sure of one thing: I was at peace.

— Suzy Szasz Palmer, RESIDENT

WILD GEESE

Poetry has always spoken to my soul. There is awe and holiness in the way poets craft and weave words.

Poetry often expresses what I feel but can't name, and I find myself frequently turning to poetry as prayer. Mary Oliver is a favorite. Her exquisite observations of the natural world leave me somehow feeling both humbled and deeply understood.

Wild Geese is one I find myself returning to again and again.

"You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves."

That last line is a prayer and sermon all to itself. "You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves."

What does the soft animal of your body love?

Those are the simple and yet profound, wonder-filled and holy things of life.

The soft animal of my body loves holding hands with my children. Their tiny hands enveloped by mine. It loves sitting in the sun on a cool day, basking in the warmth of God's love made tangible. My body loves walking mindfully through the beauty of God's creation, drinking a cup of hot coffee with way too much sugar in it, or snuggling under a cozy blanket and reading a book.

The soft animal of my body loves the innumerable joys of this life. To acknowledge the many and strikingly simple ways God's love and peace are present. And to endlessly work to keep myself fully in the present as well. To meet God right here. Right now.

How will you let the soft animal of your body love what it loves this day?

— Jenny te Velde, PASTORAL CARE

STARDUST

Two Toyota Land Cruisers pulled up under a lone acacia tree on that Kenyan hillside. Seven of us climbed down and followed our trip leader David's instructions: "Walk out by yourself onto the grassy plain of the savannah. And just listen."

I found a spot and stood in that whispering stillness. The breeze gently lifted my hair from my face. Swallows swooped across the tops of the grasses, feeding on insects too small for me to see. A dragonfly perched on a small yellow flower at my feet. Far off on the horizon, a mountain range hemmed us in. And above all of this, wisps of clouds pushed across the deep blue sky. I was filled with awe at the immense beauty that surrounded me. Utter, unspeakable awe. More than seven thousand miles from my home at Westminster Canterbury, I felt the spirit of the universe. God was even here, in the soft swish of stiff grasses, in the clouds above, the sun that brought light and life to it all.

Several months before, in January 2025, Dr. Amber Straughn stood on the stage at the Richmond Forum and showed us remarkable photos taken from the James Webb Space Telescope. Stars and planets and galaxies beyond my imagining. Two billion stars in our own Milky Way. And how many more billions of galaxies within the universe? The photographs that the telescope sent back to us were stunning in their beauty. As I listened to her lecture and watched the images on the screen, I was stunned by the glow from stars that had traveled light years to reach that telescope, and eventually, to us sitting in that auditorium.

I am not a physicist. I cannot explain the dimensions of supernovas, the formation of black holes, what makes a nebula or how stardust forms us. What I experienced was awe. Breathtaking wonder. My mind is not large enough to comprehend it. The realization, the understanding, the awareness that my life is a small part of this much bigger universe and the divinity that holds us all.

— Susan Shearouse, RESIDENT

THE SABBATH

Writer Kathleen Casey wrote that the “Sabbath is like having a date with God.”

Have we ever thought about having a date with God? What would it look like, where would we go, what would we say?

Most people consider Sunday as a time to spend with God. Maybe we have another day that is the Sabbath – a day of rest? Missionaries in the Middle East and other countries celebrate the Sabbath on the day that the culture of that country celebrates. It puts them in rhythm with the people they are trying to reach.

One friend has her day off on Friday so she maps out a day walking and praying in a nearby park or visits the Walter Morton Library at Union Presbyterian Seminary, which is free to the public. There are books about prayer, alone time with God, renewal, confession, and spiritual formation. Pastoral Care also has a library.

I like what theologian Wayne Muller wrote in his book, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives*: “Sabbath is a time to stop, to refrain from being seduced by our desires. Stop working, stop making money, stop spending money on the Sabbath. Spend a day napping, eat what is leftover in the refrigerator, play a game and do nothing of consequence or importance.”

I add another one – quit comparing ourselves to others. This will save us a lot of useless anxiety and will give us peace.

When we are on a date with God, he cares only about us. May we do the same in return.

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28

— Rev. Charlotte K. Evans, FORMER CHAPLAIN

A TOUCHING STORY

I remember a Sunday in church when communion was being served. I had been going through a very difficult time personally. There were friends and acquaintances in the church who knew this. As the bread was served to me by an elder, I felt a hand gently squeeze my right shoulder. It was such a kind gesture of caring. No words were spoken. There was no eye contact. The elder moved on to the next congregant.

This happened almost 40 years ago, and I still remember it vividly and warmly. Human touch is a fundamental way to communicate empathy, care, and support – helping to build trust and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Touch transcends words, acting as a powerful form of communication that can express deep emotion and foster profound connections.

Jesus often touched people, such as the leper and the blind man as a way to heal them. He also touched babies as a way to bless them. The kind woman who touched my shoulder did so to comfort me and to let me know that she cared.

As Muhammad Tuhin (*Science News Today*, June 27, 2025) states so eloquently, “In a world that celebrates independence, we’ve forgotten a deeper truth: humans were never designed to go it alone. We are wired for connection. Wired to matter to each other. Wired to sit around fires, share stories, sing songs, hold babies, grieve losses, and face the unknown—together. This is not weakness. It is wisdom.”

— Nancy B. Perry, RESIDENT

I AM THE REASON

In years past, as Easter was approaching, I would often find myself feeling detached from the event. Jesus was tortured and killed to atone for the sins of mankind. All believers were saved by his actions. I accepted this, yet I didn't connect personally to his sacrifice.

Then I became familiar with the musical genre known as the Requiem Mass: a mass offered in Latin for the repose of the dead. Many requiems are large in scale, with vocal soloists and chorus, symphony orchestra and organ. They may be, in turn, comforting, terrifying, serene, lush or simple. In the hands of Berlioz or Verdi or Brahms, a requiem becomes one of mankind's most glorious creations.

Requiem liturgies may include a section known as the *Recordare* (in English, "Remember") in which the listener is confronted with the startling reality of his own culpability for the life and the death of Jesus:

*"Remember merciful Jesus,
That I am the reason for Your time on earth.
Do not cast me out on that day.*

*In seeking me you sat down wearily:
Enduring the cross you redeemed me.
Do not let these pains to have been in vain.*

*Just judge of punishment,
Give me the gift of redemption
Before the day of reckoning."*

Now at Eastertime, the words of the *Recordare* remind me that I am personally connected to Christ's Passion and to the salvation it affords.

The Easter story is about Jesus – and me!

HOW DO WE GET TO EASTER?

How do we teach our small children the majesty of the Resurrection through the misery of a man? How do we convey the concept of a godhead, creating himself into a human to pass on his directions for all life?

How do we give birth and cherish our new, sweet infant? We take every precaution possible to protect that child. For Easter, we present colored eggs and bunnies, spring flowers and overflowing baskets of treats. And then we present the story of a young man sentenced to a horrible death. How do we go from egg hunts and jelly beans and baby chicks to a man tortured and berated for his beliefs, and then nailed to a cross? We are taught that he screamed his last words asking why his father had abandoned him.

How do we make that leap? How do we teach other peoples, other nations, why they should want to be a part of this thinking?

Is a lifetime long enough to learn about birth to death; remorse to redemption; persecution to Resurrection?

How did we grasp this ancient Lenten Journey and make it mean so much to so many?

How indeed?

— Geré Brown, RESIDENT

FINGERPRINTS

(Heard on the radio – from a country-western song)

“His fingerprints can be seen on everything...”

Indeed:

in the brisk, dark, silent cold air punctuated by glowing, pale
yellow moonlight;

on the snowfall’s multitude of flakes, each a uniquely
crystalized star – disappearing at the instance of warmth;

one misty rain-grey atmospheric day, a puffball mushroom
discovered bursting through dark mulch shards – surprising large
velvet creamy balloon – destined to age to a burst of brown dust;

the dahlia’s dramatic blossom – from a center of curved petals
emanating, like a flash of light, inflating outward in explosive
dramatic color;

clouds viewed in the distance – white to steel gray jetties
undulating – shredded cotton piling one upon another –
imitating distant mountain ranges or impending dramatic
weather;

an uplifting gasp of breath, catching a geese formation gliding
above – the atmosphere’s silent formation punctuated with the
calls of instinctive collaboration;

a peaceful moment – considering one’s own accomplishment
– with thanks whispered for a talent inexplicably given
and received;

look closely – not searching the heavens but peering rather
down the microscope’s barrel to an atom’s heart;

His fingerprints are indeed on everything.

– Scott Boyer, RESIDENT

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

It was one of those perfect sun-filled days, as I walked the hills of my home town. I did not enjoy the weather. Instead, my thoughts were upon how unfairly the world was treating me.

I had just graduated from law school and had been studying my job options like practicing law, Army JAG or teaching law. But these options were now closed to me, at least until I regained my health from my recent diagnosis of diabetes. This was my first day walking to help me restore my health and I was angry with the world.

As I crossed the crest of the hill, out of the bright sunshine and coming from the opposite direction emerged my high school friend, Bill, who I had played baseball with. Bill had just received the terrible news he had terminal cancer. Because of his condition, I had a hesitant moment of how to open the conversation with Bill. But he took over first with his strong handshake, his warm stories of our baseball days and his comment, "Can you believe this perfect day? How can we be so lucky?" How could two old friends interpret life and sunshine so differently?

As Bill departed, I felt like a Mack truck had hit me. It left me with thoughts of my diabetes care that helped me find a new and positive perspective that remains with me to this day. Although I am certainly no expert and after years of thinking about this matter, I believe I experienced a touch of the Divine that long past sunny day.

— Ed Betts, RESIDENT

SPIRIT FILLED LIFE

Reflecting on the past 90 years of my life, I recall many spiritual moments. As each spiritual memory comes to my mind, I savor the details that made it special – the day, the time, the place, the people who were with me and the feelings. Today, I realize even more that they were holy moments. I was blessed with a loving mother with deep spiritual faith. Her presence influenced me throughout my life, even after she died when I was 49. Mom taught me so much about living a spirit-filled life, but it was not so much what she taught as much as what she did. Looking back in time, Mom was with me during my growing pains, my joys, my troubles, and her connectedness with many of my spiritual moments.

The details of my first spiritual moments are still very clear. By 1940, my parents had five children. I was six years old, and the youngest was my little sister Isabelle, eighteen months old. In late November of 1941, Isabelle was diagnosed with influenza meningitis. She was so sick and was quarantined in the hospital. My mother could only watch Isabelle from a window, never holding her little suffering child. Penicillin would have saved her life, but it wasn't created yet.

Every evening our family kneeled around my parents' bed with Mom leading prayers for Isabelle. Isabelle died after eight days. It was so emotional to see my mother crying, and she tried so hard to be brave. My father was just numb with sorrow. We prayed together often with Mom's assurance that Isabelle was now in Heaven and God was taking good care of her. It was a spiritual moment for me at six years old when I saw Isabelle in the little white satin casket, looking like she had just gone peacefully to sleep. I knew then that I was not afraid of death, and she died because God wanted her back in Heaven. I still believe that about death today.

— Pat Kawana, RESIDENT

REJOICING IN WINTER

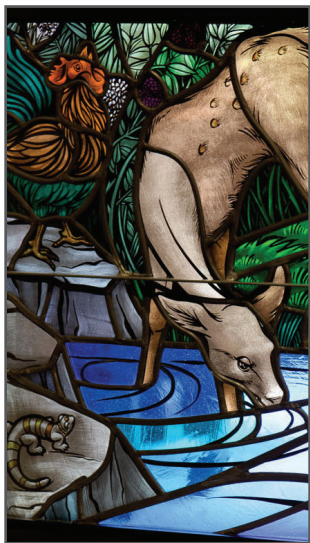
Sometime in early March 1984, I realized that I'd always liked winter. I was watching my eldest son, Barry – then seven years old – glide over the ice on a frozen pond in Ithaca, New York, reaching a great distance with each stroke, as if he were making a point with each push off the ice. From the corner of my eye, I caught the dancing motion of his younger brother, five-year-old Isaac. His musical strides reminded me of a song. The father/teacher in me was pleased I hadn't simply taught them techniques but had instead nurtured their own individual styles. I was too naive a parent to know that, despite all my fatherly concern, I couldn't force my methods on their bodies, even if I had tried.

I still love winter – even though I no longer ice skate, with or without my grown children, or grandchildren. I rejoice in the season, when nature seems to be telling me to slow down. To appreciate all the love in my life. To recall the life that lies beneath the frozen ponds of Ithaca and wonder now at the light beyond the clouds at my Richmond home. I'm amazed that what appears dormant will burst into stunning blossoms at just the right time in the cycle of the seasons.

When I hear friends complain about winter, I often jokingly say, “anyone can love nature on a warm spring day, but it takes a true lover of nature to appreciate winter.”

Dear God, help us during this Lenten season to appreciate the silence and darkness of winter in the faithful belief that there is life not only in earth's apparent barrenness, but also in your ever-present love.

— Larry I. Palmer, RESIDENT



WESTMINSTER CANTERBURY RICHMOND

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