

A close-up photograph of a small green plant with a white flower bud growing out of a crack in dark asphalt. The plant has several green leaves and a single white bud at the top. The background is a blurred, greyish surface.

New Growth

A 2021 Lenten Devotional

Written by the community of
St Francis Episcopal Church

W elcome to the fifth annual Lenten Devotional Booklet.

For those of you encountering this booklet for the first time, these reflections are written by members of the parish and clergy of St. Francis Episcopal Church and are in response to the daily readings assigned by the Common Lectionary for the Lenten Season. The thoughtful reflections published in these booklets have been at the center of a Lenten practice for many in our community, and we hope that this year these writings will continue to challenge and inspire.

We begin on Ash Wednesday, reflecting on the mark of the cross we receive on our foreheads as a reminder of the precious gift that is this earthly life. Ash Wednesday begins the season where we prepare for the journey to Holy Week by slowing down and asking ourselves how we are living our Christian life, how we are doing in the tension that always exists between the demands of the world and the values of our lives as followers of Jesus. On Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, we enter into remembering the last days of Jesus and the gift of new life in the risen Christ.

However you decide to strive for a holy Lent – maybe giving up something you enjoy or adding something to your routine or reaching out to others – may that practice be a loving reminder of what God has given you.

May our Lenten practice with these reflections be real for us in the ever present Now of God. May our prayers and our search for God be grounded in our relationships, in the power of the created world, in a love beyond our imagining, and in those small moments when we are alone with God, who knows the depths of our hearts.

Thank you to all who said “Yes” to the invitation to write, and thank you to the staff and volunteers dedicated to getting this published.

In gratitude,

The Rev Jude Lyons and Kristina Pelá



How to Have a Devotional Time

A Devotional Time is any time and any place you decide to sit quietly with God, preferably alone, and without distraction. Some may choose early morning, before the rush of the day. Some may choose the evening when others are occupied with other things. Others may keep this booklet in the car and find quiet time in a parking lot waiting for the end of swim practice! God is there waiting for you wherever you are.

Guidelines for devotional time often suggest that you try to carve out a regular time during your day and to try to keep it consistent, but that may not be realistic for you. Removing yourself from distractions is more important than a consistent time, and so you want to turn off all electronics and move away from visual or audible noise. It is hard to hear God amidst the clatter around us.

Start with a short prayer to invite God into your devotional time. You can speak from your heart or use a prepared prayer such as this:

*Dear God,
Quiet my heart so that I may be still before you.
Fill me with your presence,
and let your word and the reflections of your people
help me to hear your voice.*

Read each scripture passage assigned for the day, slowly, and then pause between each one, allowing it to sink in. Then read the written reflection and notice what connects with you or touches you in some way. You may want to take notes or journal. Or you may want to just sit in silence to reflect alone. Let your reflection include your Lenten journey, your aims and your experiences.

Close with prayer thanking God for this devotional time and the way in which God has spoken to you in the readings and reflections. Add prayers for any needs you might have at this time and for the needs of people around you, the church and the nation. You can speak from your heart or use a prepared prayer such as this:

*Thank you for the gift of time
And the chance to draw closer to you
Help me to take what I have received
Into my heart so that I may share your love with others.*

May this prayer time fill you and be a delight.

Jude+

Ash Wednesday, February 17

Isaiah 58:1-12, Psalm 103, Corinthians 5:20-26, Matthew 6:1-6; 16; 21

“I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word. And, to make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel before the Lord, our maker and redeemer.” (BCP 265)

This prayer was said every Ash Wednesday in our beautiful chapel and reminds me of how much I miss our chapel, our 8:00 services on Sundays, and especially our special services, such as Ash Wednesday. Like so many of you, I am moved by the beauty of the chapel, the holiness one feels once inside. It is easy to pray there, and kneeling seems so right. I am sad that we will not be able to gather in the chapel to kneel and pray on this Ash Wednesday.

But maybe this year we are asked to experience an unadorned Lent, without the comforting beauty of our chapel. I will miss it so much, but I know that this Lent we are to examine and consider not only our own lives, but also the lives of those who have little comfort, including the beauty of holiness.

In this passage from The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1), Jesus challenges us to question our sincerity by looking at how we live, spend our money, pray, treat others, feed our minds and hearts, and trust in God. Jesus asks us to look honestly at our part in the divisions in our lives, the starkness in the lives of others, and to repent when we put our own will before the will of God. Jesus is not scolding or condemning us; he is merely inviting us into the love and forgiveness of God. And so this year we will have to forego the beauty of the chapel.

But know — it waits for us!

I wish you a very holy Lent.



Rev. Jude+ came to St. Francis as a seminarian, was ordained to the priesthood a year ago, and is now the Associate Rector. She fell in love with St. Francis her first day, and considers it a privilege to help the parish ride the waves of this uncertain time.

Thursday, February 18

Deuteronomy 7:6-11, Psalm 37: 19-42, Titus 1:1-16, John 1:29-34

Reflections on Psalm 37:19-42

In my morning quiet time, I always read the appointed Psalm(s) and write down a phrase that can become a guiding thought for the day. The Psalmist often records God's promises which are encouraging and comforting, many of which are later reiterated in the New Testament by Jesus.

Today's verses contrast good with evil and the godly with the wicked and tell us how we can live a righteous life. The promises: "*Our footsteps are directed by the Lord; he strengthens those in whose way he delights.*" . . . "*he does not forsake his faithful ones.*" . . . "*If they stumble, they shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds them by the hand.*"

Just how do we have access to this comfort and guidance? The Psalmist shows us the way: "*Turn from evil and do good . . . For the Lord loves justice,*" and, . . . "*those who are honest . . . upright . . . (and) peaceable.*" Also, "*The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is right.*"

It is always a challenge to find a way to shut out the noise of the world and our restless thoughts in order to make room for God to help us live this kind of life. The Book of Common Prayer offers a prayer for guidance on pg. 832: "*Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us do . . . so that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path we may not stumble.*" I often remind myself of verse 10 of Psalm 46: "*Be still, and know that I am God,*" and I add the words "*and listen.*" I am often so busy asking God for things that I'm not quiet long enough to be able to discern God's voice and will.

As our country begins to heal from unbelievable turmoil and sickness, may we seek God's will to become beacons of honesty and peace to others.



Laurie Anderson, an LA native, has lived in PV for 50 years and became a member of St. Francis when Fr. Dean Farrar was Rector. Until COVID she was a chalice bearer at the 8:00 services (which she misses terribly!). Her husband of 56 years, Keith, sadly, now lives in Belmont Village's memory care facility. Her two sons and their families are in San Jose.

Friday, February 19

Deuteronomy 7:12-16, Psalm 35, Titus 2:1-15, John 1:35-42

“If you heed these ordinances, by diligently observing them, the Lord your God will maintain with you the covenant loyalty that he swore to your ancestors...” Deuteronomy 7:12

“But as for you, teach what is consistent with sound doctrine. Tell the older men to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance...” Titus 2:1-2

I find as a “type A” personality it can be tempting to struggle against things that are often beyond my control—to try to “do something” instead of remaining steadfast and quiet in faith that God has a plan which will be revealed in His time. I know I am not alone in thrashing against things to find a solution to a problem or grabbing at this theory or that one to try to make sense of the world. Humans seem programmed to seek control, to know, and to make our own solutions, oftentimes to our detriment. Scripture reminds me that I need not fight or fret, that my salvation will come by relaxing into the unknowing, by carrying on with prudence, diligence, thoughtfulness and a heart fixed on God.

In pandemic days these passages feel like an assertion to stay the course, to choose to live with prudence and caution and to cling to faith in times when a viral enemy is wreaking havoc on the world. It is as though God is calling to us, saying, “Steady on!” We have been crying out to Him for deliverance and now a vaccine is here, but we must be patient, obedient, and temperate and let His plan evolve. While Pfizer and Moderna will protect our bodies, it is diligence in faith, hope and love which vaccinate us against the things which deplete our souls.



Holly Henebry has worn many hats at St. Francis for the last two decades; her newest hat is that of Senior Warden. She longs for the day when she can wear one of her extensive collection of actual hats in church again.

Saturday, February 20

Deuteronomy 7:17-2, Psalm 43, Titus 3:1-15, John 1:43-51

Reflections on Psalm 43.

Recently, I was talking with my 16-year-old son who was studying “personality types” in school. He thought he fit the “optimist” type and asked what I thought I was. I said, “I have always thought of myself as an optimist – sometimes to a fault when I should be looking at the risks and issues around me with more discernment.” Over the next several weeks, however, I noted myself getting discouraged by the events unfolding in our country and the ongoing malaise surrounding the pandemic. It caused me to relook at myself as an “optimist.” Maybe that isn’t who I am anymore?

The dictionary notes the word “optimist” as a noun defined as “a person who tends to be hopeful and confident about the future or the success of something.” But it also describes the philosophy as, “a person who believes that this world is the best of all possible worlds or that good must ultimately prevail over evil.” What is not mentioned is faith. Maybe in addition to being hopeful and assuming things will work out for the best, God is asking me to be faithful. Even the most optimistic of us knows there are good days and bad days, ups and downs. What can get us through the difficult times is our faith that God is in that place with us. Psalm 43 is titled “Prayer to God in Time of Trouble.” It is a call for help when we feel oppressed and mournful. It doesn’t tell us that we have to be upbeat all the time, but to have faith and praise God even when our soul is disquieted.

I find this scripture reassuring in these times where much is unknown and unpredictable. I miss my regular routine, church family, getting together with friends and even running errands without worrying about the risks. During Lent, I will focus more on my faith and allow myself to find comfort in the uncomfortable. I have faith I will regain that optimistic outlook!



Mary Deley has been a member of St. Francis church for the past 18 years. She and her husband Tony have three children: Adelaide, Clara and Will. In addition to serving at St. Francis, she enjoys reading, walking and volunteering in the community.

Sunday, February 21

Lord, make me an
instrument of Thy Peace

...



Monday, February 22

Deuteronomy 8:11-20, Psalm 44, Hebrews 2:11-18, John 2: 1-12

Water into wine. Jesus's first miracle is perhaps his best known ... or was it? Yes, it's the miracle most people recognize as Christ's first, but the first chapter of John tells us that Jesus knew Peter's name before he said it and told Nathanael that he had seen him under the fig tree in his mind—all this after being proclaimed the “Lamb of God” by no less than John the Baptist. In other words, the “miracle of Cana” may not have been Christ's first miracle, so much as his first public one. Even still, it represents a slow revelation of the power of Jesus.

We are told that Mary came to Christ on the third day of a wedding feast to inform him that the wine was gone. Christ knows what Mary is asking before she asks, and Mary knows what he is capable of before she goes to him. It stands to reason that you cannot be the mother of Christ and not, at some point during his childhood and young adulthood, notice that he is capable of miracles. Despite his protestations about not being ready to reveal his full self, Christ obliges Mary and tells the servants to fill jars with water then draw some and take it to the master of the banquet.

The rest we know. The water has become wine, and (no surprise really) it is better than anything that has been served during the feast. We are not told why the servants didn't proclaim the miracle, and it stands to reason that many of the wedding's attendees, especially on the third day of the party, would not care how the wine got there. Mary already knew what Christ was capable of, but to the disciples and the servants, this miracle was proof of what John the Baptist had proclaimed and a sign of greater miracles to come. This section of John is followed by a description of Jesus clearing the temple of merchants and money changers, showing his disciples and the world that his ministry would grow beyond mere wine and wedding parties.



Tim Coleman is an English teacher at Palos Verdes Peninsula High School. He has been a member of St. Francis for the last 6 years and can't wait to return to in-person services.

Tuesday, February 23

Deuteronomy 9:4-12, Psalm 48, Hebrews 3:1-11, John 2:13-22

“Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house...” Hebrews 3:6

As I read this passage, the image of people as God’s house caught my attention. I thought, “of course” God is spirit, and He must live within the spirits of people in the world. But how can a house be built of people? I asked myself what God’s house really looked like to me.

I recalled that morning years ago when myself and a small group of friends first visited Echo Park in downtown Los Angeles to distribute boxes of sandwiches and fruit to the hungry and the homeless. My nervousness quickly disappeared as the grateful spirits of those we served washed over us. Each return visit has left me with a deeper connection to those people and to God. I now understand that I was serving a meal to God’s people in His house. His house was not the park, it was not a church, but it was the place where people join each other in the common good. God’s house is truly built from the people of this world.

But as my mind reflected on God’s house, both today and as it was long ago when Hebrews was written, I suddenly heard a remarkable commercial on television. The commercial said, “We are building our house, not from brick and mortar, but from the people who work and strive for a better world.” This is precisely the same image expressed in Hebrews. I then realized how deeply the biblical imagery has penetrated our society and our culture, expressing itself in a completely non-religious context. I wondered if the people who wrote this commercial even realized that they were drawing their imagery from biblical texts. I realized that it did not matter, this was God, continuing to build His house.



Albert Zimmerman has been a St. Francis parishioner for the past 22 years. He and his family have enjoyed the parish as a special place of worship, spiritual renewal, and a deeper connection to the mysteries of God. He is embracing the new world that is emerging from the shadows cast by the light that has surrounded us.

Wednesday, February 24

1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 33, 1 Samuel 12:1-5, Acts 20:17-35

“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7

While walking the other day, I ran across one of our less fortunate homeless friends. His name is Dave, and my husband Jack and I have come to know him and reach out to him when we see him. After acknowledging him and offering him oranges, I walked on.

I began to think about what the Lord said to Samuel in Chapter 16, about not looking at his appearance or his height, for the Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Dave is a kind man with a very unkempt appearance, but his heart is good; as an advocate for the homeless, it is only fitting that I follow the Lord’s words and “look at his heart.” There are so many less fortunate than us, and we are truly blessed to have been given so much to be thankful for.

As a nurse in a rural ER, I encountered many homeless individuals and people in need. Each had a story that at times I found heartwarming, and other times, heart wrenching. If only we could all look beyond the outward appearance of people and look into the heart, because as I always say, “We all bleed the same color.”

As the last words in Acts 20:35 so clearly state, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* We all have something to give; reach out and give back to someone in need.



Sue Ferme and her husband Jack are native Angelinos. They have three sons and ten grandchildren, all whom they are very close to, even though they all live out of state. The Fermes enjoy travel between Idaho and Texas to see their kids, and to Arizona, where they have their second home. They love and miss their St. Francis family, who fill in for their out of state families.

Thursday, February 25

Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5, Psalm 19, Hebrews 4:1-10, John 3:16-21

“...but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.” Hebrews 4:2

For most of my life, I’ve been a fairly positive person and seen the world through a positive lens. Even when conflicts have arisen, hardships have struck, and life has taken turns I wish it hadn’t, having a relatively “easy” time trusting God and His provision has come naturally to me.

But the past couple of years, both my mental and physical states were adversely affected by anxiety. For whatever reason(s), I no longer readily “combined” my day-to-day life with faith. You could say that “academically” I still had faith, but it was more of a “head” feeling than a “heart and soul” feeling, and without the heart and soul connection, I was left feeling more and more dejected at the state of the world and the concerns in my personal life.

After several days of intense anxiety and no apparent end in sight, out of desperation I finally lit a candle and put all my focus on God instead of my concerns. I prayed out loud, first thanking Him for the many, many positives in my life, then praying for others’ needs, and finally praying my own personal petitions for my family as well as voicing my stresses and asking for Peace. Perhaps an hour or two went by when I suddenly realized I had Peace! And nothing about my outside circumstances had changed! But obviously my internal circumstances and focus changed, and I am reminded that sometimes our prayers might change our situation, but sometimes our prayers just change us.

So this Lent, may we engage more with God; may we not just hear the gospel that is preached to us. May we instead receive life-giving value by combining it with our faith, which is nurtured by being in relationship with God. And what better way to do that than through open, honest, heart-baring prayer?



Kristina Pelá and her husband Fabrizio joined St. Francis in 2000. Kristina relishes serving as Pastoral Care Shepherd and being a member of the Prayer Chain and the Intercessory Prayer Team.

Friday, February 26

Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Psalm 51, Hebrews 4:11-16, John 3:22-36

After reading Hebrews and John, one phrase from each stood out and I put them together. *“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:16) and *“For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.”* (John 3:34).

Though I always pray, over this past year I felt the need for God’s help even more than usual and never begged so much for His mercy nor sought His help so much. If you ever saw the movie Bruce Almighty, where Jim Carrey gets to be God, you might remember one of my favorite scenes. It’s when Jim Carrey tries to organize prayer requests and puts them on post-it notes, only to find every square inch of his room covered in them. Well, that’s what I feel like I’ve done to God. Between worrying about my husband, our families, friends and myself, I feel like the sheer number of my requests would have papered every square inch of heaven if God uses post-its!

Through prayer I have found His mercy, and it helped me discover His grace in so many things. I’ve always looked at the beauty of our world with appreciation; however, my gratitude for all He has done for us grew even more this year for the beautiful sunshine we have almost daily; the gorgeous green grass as I play golf; the ever-changing waters of the ocean; the smile on my husband’s face; the warm voice of family members and friends over the telephone line. His grace granted me the ability to cherish every conversation and to keep in touch more frequently. It encouraged me to do random acts of kindness for others and the ability to accept those done to me. God’s spirit truly is limitless. I will continue to request His mercy and find God’s grace each day in my daily life and hope you will join me in doing so.



Mary Ann Cronin has been a member of St. Francis since 1997. She is currently co-directress of the Altar Guild and enjoys serving the parish family in any way possible. She and her husband live in Palos Verdes and look forward to visits from out-of-town family, friends and local friends again in 2021 as well as being able to hug them all in person and not just in thought.

Saturday, February 27

Deuteronomy 11:18-28, Psalm 138, Hebrews 5:1-10, John 4:1-26

“You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul.”

Deuteronomy 11:18

Deuteronomy tells us to put the words of God into our hearts and souls and to teach them to our children, “talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.” As I reached middle age, I felt the need to learn more about the word of God and began to study the Bible more deeply. My need continued to grow, and one of the top items on my “list of things I want to do after retirement” was to learn more about the Bible.

The word of God gives us great insight into the nature of Jesus and what it means to be his disciple. Today’s Gospel reading is of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. What struck me was that, in spite of her sins, the woman knew her scriptures and knew that *“Messiah is coming... When he comes he will reveal all things to us.”* Jesus revealed himself to her as the Messiah, the first time John reports him as doing so to anyone. Jesus knew that, through her, many Samaritans would believe in him because of her testimony.

The author of Hebrews gives us another look into the nature of Jesus, this time as a great high priest. He states that Christ did not glorify himself, but was appointed by God as *“a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”* The quote in Hebrews is from Psalm 110, and the reference to Melchizedek goes all the way back to Genesis 14:18. Thus, the author of Hebrews provides a connection from Jesus back to Abraham.

Psalm 138 is a psalm of thanksgiving and praise. It expresses thanks directly to God, giving thanks *“for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything”* (Psalm 138:2). The readings for today tell us to put the word of God into our hearts and souls and to thank God for his steadfast love and faithfulness for giving us his word to increase our strength of soul (Psalm 138:3).



Suellen is a new member of St. Francis. She is a retired aerospace engineer, educated in mathematics and experienced in software. Her principal hobby is music. She sings in the Choir, plays the recorder, and loves learning about the word of God.

Sunday, February 28

...Where there is hatred,
let me sow love;
where there is injury,
pardon;



Monday, March 1

Jeremiah 1:11-19, Psalm 64, Romans 1:1-15, John 4:27-42

(After Jesus had finished speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well), “(T)he disciples were urging him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’ So the disciples said to one another, ‘Surely no one has brought him something to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.’” John 4:31-33

In the Scripture above, the disciples recognize the importance of food for our body. This is the common way in which food is referenced. We all recognize that eating good food – and avoiding bad food – is important for our physical well-being.

We also need good food for our mind or it will atrophy. The sources of nourishment for the mind are innumerable and depend on the individual person. In my case, as an attorney, when dealing with a particular legal issue, and when necessary to do so, I find it intellectually stimulating to research the applicable law and find the statute or case that applies to that issue and that will help solve the problem.

We also need good food for our soul. This is the nourishment that the spirit of Jesus Christ gives us. I find that following Jesus’ example of helping others when possible feeds my soul. For example, an individual whom I believe to be homeless and whom I have helped over the years sometimes visits the Church. One time, I helped carry this person’s two heavy bags of earthly possessions from the Church to the nearby bus stop. I noticed that one bag was coming apart, bought a new one at the Target store, and helped transfer some of the individual’s possessions to the new bag the next time we happened to meet at the Church. I was happy that I could help in this way and thought, “I am doing what Jesus Christ would do.”



Richard Briggs is a life-long Episcopalian from Chicago, Illinois. He has been a member of the Parish for almost forty years. He is married to Sara Schulz, whom he met through the Church, and has two sons from a prior marriage and two step-sons.

Tuesday, March 2

Jeremiah 2:1-13, Psalm 68:1-20, 24-36, Romans 1:16-25, John 4:43-54

Jeremiah is tough to read, because so much of what the prophet said rings true, so true, today. *“The Lord brought us into a plentiful land [world] to eat the fruit thereof and enjoy the goodness thereof.”* (verse 7), but over and over again we have despoiled His wonderful creation. In its place we have changed our gods - even though there are no gods!

The Lord gives Jeremiah an analogy (a parable, in the Old Testament style) to understand this decline in verse 13, when He describes a pure, fresh fountain of water that is forsaken in favor of a cistern which is broken. It won't work. It won't hold water.

Yet the Lord pleads with us, and with our children. And our prayers in return plead for mercy. The Lord is giving us another chance.

On a personal level, how often have I turned away from what I knew to be right in order to please my own false gods? How often have I chosen expedience over discomfort? How often have I looked away from beauty around me and filled my thoughts with hate? How often have I chosen to recall past grievances so that I can imagine revenge, even though I know in my heart that the right way to go is forgiveness? False gods take many forms!



Joe Young counts his friendship with St. Francis parishioner Gayle Taylor as one of his many blessings. They share many interests, especially reflecting on Biblical passages and their meaning today. They also share love for the outdoors, live theatre, travel, and space.

Wednesday, March 3

Jeremiah 3:6-18, Psalm 119:73-96, Romans 1:28-2:11, John 5:1-18

“Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments...Let thy tender mercy come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.” Psalm 119:73-77

During this pandemic, we have been ordering our groceries online and picking up at curbside almost weekly. There is a core group of associates who have helped us select our orders and load them into the trunk of our car. One young man for whatever reason always appeared unhappy whenever he helped us and was, in fact, sometimes quite rude. So, we wondered why? Nonetheless, we always greeted him warmly and thanked him for helping us. Near Christmas time, we gave the team of associates — including this “unhappy” young man — small gifts to express our appreciation. This young man finally flashed a smile and told us how much he appreciated our little gift. He explained that he consistently gets yelled at by everyone while working and it had become so stressful to the point he ended up in the hospital just days before we gave him the small gift.

We finally learned the root of his unhappiness and that mercy endures.



This devotional was submitted with the request to remain anonymous.

Thursday, March 4

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28, Psalm 74, Romans 2:12-24, John 5:19-29

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life...” John 5:24

I think that to “hear” Jesus’ word means more than just listening, and that to believe in our Lord God means more than just saying you believe. Rather, the Lord wants us to act in the way we should act.

This is not easy to do. For one thing, the Lord’s admonitions are often absolute. For example, we are to love the Lord thy God “with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind” (emphasis added), and we are to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” However, since we are imperfect by nature, it is impossible to obey His commandments so single-mindedly all the time.

But the Lord is also merciful and compassionate, and I believe He is satisfied if we simply do our best. Let me give one simple example. Just like many of you, I receive numerous solicitations for money every week in the mail from charitable organizations across the country (even, in one instance, a very small college in rural Kentucky that I had never heard of). The causes are all worthy. But there is no way that I can contribute to many—let alone all—of them. I am forced to choose and of necessity many charities do not receive even an acknowledgement, even though their needs may be greater. I think the Lord understands this. As Rev. Paula said in one of her sermons last Fall, “It is not ‘either/or,’ rather, it is ‘both/and.’”

My father William Briggs passed away in March 1987 from cancer. I will always remember his final words: “Lord, I am in your hands. Please take me.” My father had faith in our Lord. He lived out his faith in many good ways. He took care of his family and cared for others. I believe he has eternal life.



Richard Briggs is a life-long Episcopalian from Chicago, Illinois. He has been a member of the Parish for almost forty years. He is married to Sara Schulz, whom he met through the Church, and has two sons from a prior marriage and two step-sons.

Friday, March 5

Jeremiah 5:1-9, Psalm 73, Romans 2:25-3:18, John 5:30-47

“I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?” John 5:43-47

I was given four different bible passages to consider... and went through them, one by one, waiting for some “resonance”. After reading (and re-reading) the first three passages I was beginning to panic. Has this Pandemic completely “numbed” my senses? And then I started in on the passage in John 5:30-47. Right away I identified with the sense of frustration in Jesus’ voice.

After listening to unending conflicting views on COVID, the election, and the future of our nation, it was refreshing to hear Jesus cut right through all of the chaff and see how he dismembers the arguments of his doubters, finally asserting that “if you do not believe what he (Moses) WROTE, how will you believe what I say?”

The word “truth” has recently been over-used, and its contents rarely subjected to rigorous proof. But in John 5:43-47, Jesus turns the tables on his accusers by asserting that if they TRULY believed in their own faith, then they MUST believe him... for their own Moses wrote about his (Jesus) coming.

Today, as in Jesus’ time, “The Truth” is often bent and distorted beyond belief. People will embellish, deny, or distort “facts” to fit their favorite preconceived conclusions. However, this does NOT mean that all “Truth” is subjective... it only means that we are each responsible for using all of our skills and senses, and our faith in God to search it out, and not simply seek to “accept glory from one another.” God’s peace and love to all.....



David Gerhardt is a lifelong Episcopalian, Engineer, Cyclist, Photographer, and lover of Greyhounds. He is also blessed to be married (for 50 years, in July) to his college sweetheart, HeeSun K. Gerhardt.

Saturday, March 6

Jeremiah 5:20-31, Psalm 23, Romans 3:19-31, John 7:1-13

At 23, while backpacking through Europe, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor. In a moment, my life unraveled. I was terrified, and I felt betrayed by God. Nothing made sense anymore. The words of the Psalmist rang hollow to me. Where was God? How would God keep me safe? In the shadow of my death where could I find comfort? What could I trust God for?

Back then I thought God's love was like a magic power preventing terrible things from happening to me, that it was supposed to give me things I needed. Though I could recite Psalm 23 by heart, I didn't understand it.

David uses powerful metaphors to show us the depth of God's relationship with us. Like sheep sheltered in the safe presence of the shepherd, we are guided and comforted through whatever dangers we encounter along the way. And like the honored guest who is welcomed with an extravagant feast in the presence of those who sought to harm him, we, too, can know that God will hear our prayers. Often, we pray for specific outcomes from God, and yet when everything is stripped away, what we long for is to have God with us no matter what happens.

The Psalmist knew intimately what it is to experience God's faithfulness. Many times, it must have seemed to David and to the watching world as if God had abandoned him. But he had a deep assurance that even when all the evidence was to the contrary, that God was faithful.

Now I understand that the Psalm talks of something deeper, and more profound than what I can get from God. It means that no matter what happens to me, nothing can separate me from this loving presence—not even my anger or my resistance. God is relentless in his love for us and this broken world. He comforts us even as we are inconsolable. The Lord is our shepherd. We shall never want for his presence and love. We will be comforted as a parent protects and comforts a child.



Alison Houghton-Kral is a wanderer—she has lived on three continents, travelled extensively, worked in several different professions, is curious, and is restless in her pursuit of beauty, food, and the next great cup of espresso.

Sunday, March 6

...Where there is doubt,
(let me sow) faith;
where there is despair,
hope;



Monday, March 8

Jeremiah 7:1-15, Psalm 77, Romans 4:1-12, John 7:14-36

"I cry aloud to God."

"In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord."

"You keep my eyelids from closing; I am so troubled that I cannot speak."

Were these lines from Psalm 77 written just for me? I feel they were, but I am confident during this past year each of us could ask that question. How many times during the stress, confusion, fear, anger, desperation, and isolation did I cry aloud to God? So many times each day and night...

Beginning with my daily morning prayers, I petitioned God as the list seemed to grow each day. But I also counted my blessings since I have more than I deserve. I continually thought about my former students and their families confined, truly confined to one room, unable to look at the ocean or walk to the park to see God's colors. I also continually repeated "God's will be done". I had to hold onto faith; I had to hold onto God!

Days are so different, but I can adjust as every other human being is. I cannot solve all the problems facing the country, though I have some ideas. Those ideas, fears about the past political situation, health of my family and friends, my 87-year-old sister contracting Covid, my students - all these kept my eyelids from closing. Yes, I was so troubled but I was able to speak, sometimes too loudly! Yet, at meal blessings and at night-time prayer, I remembered to thank God for his wonders and miracles.

Yes, God's marvelous and miraculous deeds happened in the past and more marvelous deeds lie ahead if I am just patient. I am now comforted and hopeful because I feel God has a plan. I see and hear more of it each day now. I am ready to sing aloud to God instead of cry aloud. I am ready to dance to the sweet melody...



Liz Cantine is a retired classroom educator, current dance educator and author. She serves as a Reader and Prayer Team and Card Writing ministry member and loves the church family. God has blessed her with husband Richard, son Tom, Miranda, three grandchildren and two Goddaughters.

Tuesday, March 9

Jeremiah 7:21-34, Psalm 78:40-72, Romans 4:13-25, John 7:37-52

As time slips silently by, the will of God manifests itself to us all. We pray fervently to God for guidance and direction in our everyday lives. We want to do the right thing, but sometimes we fail.

If you are like me, you often ask, “How can I know the will of God?” God can be distant and hidden, and knowing what He expects can be hard.

One way we can know the will of God is through our daily prayers. We can ask for help and God will answer. These answers can come to us directly or through other people. If you ask a holy person, “What would you do if you were me?” the answer may surprise you or cause you to think about your problem more deeply.

Another way we can know the will of God is through Holy Scripture. Most human conditions are found in the Bible. By reading and studying the Bible, we often find God’s direction and will.

In our search for the will of God, we must guard against false gods or idolatry. There are many people who would give us false advice or misleading help. Sometimes we erroneously rely on chance in our attempt to find the will of God.

Our search for God’s will eventually leads us to obedience. This is a state of grace where we direct all our activities toward God’s will. It also means giving up some of our own desires.

We must use our will to be obedient to God’s will. When we do this, we will be at peace and experience happiness.



John Dingee has been a member of St. Francis Church since 2003. He faithfully serves as Reader at the Wednesday noon-time services and as our Librarian. He has two children and four grandchildren and lives in Torrance.

Wednesday, March 10

Jeremiah 8:18-9:6, Psalm 81, Romans 5:1-11, John 8:12-20

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Romans 5:1-5

These words carry so much weight, so much strength, so much comfort.

For me, the assurance that I can’t mess up this life is powerful. Faith in Jesus is all I need for God’s grace and peace along with the bonus of sharing God’s glory.

I try not to put myself in painful situations, and I want to protect those I love from those types of situations, too. As a result, I spend a lot of effort avoiding those situations—a ridiculous amount of effort, in fact.

To “glory in sufferings” or “rejoice in problems and trials” is not something I look forward to doing. But knowing these verses end with a positive outcome, perhaps I can accept those moments with an attitude of challenge: to develop endurance, in order to strengthen character and be able to confidently experience hope. And sometimes I need hope; it can be so elusive at moments. I must not forget the promise of God’s love has already been given!

Dear Lord, I pray you will help me not to fear hard, sad, uncomfortable moments. I want to remember that with faith I have nothing to fear. You’ve got this under control. I will not be disappointed. You dearly love me and promise to fill my heart with that love. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.



Susie Willigrod and her husband Steve have been attending St Francis for about 7 years. Susie came for the choir, but we have found the entire church to be a loving home.

Thursday, March 11

Jeremiah 10:11-24, Psalm 85, Romans 5:12-21, John 8:21-32

“If the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ.”
Romans 5:15

As a child I loved watching the movie version of Frank Baum’s classic novel, “The Wizard of Oz.” In those long ago days before Netflix and Amazon Prime allowed us to watch any movie at any time, my sister and I looked forward to the one Sunday afternoon each year when “*The Wizard of Oz*” was broadcast on network television. We laughed with Dorothy’s new friends in Munchkin Land, we shivered when she confronted the Wicked Witch, and we rejoiced when she clapped her red shoes together and returned to her home.

Most of all we learned that Dorothy was saved when she changed the story she was telling herself. From a lonely little girl in Kansas she grew into a courageous person able to recognize that she was loved and was capable of confronting her fears and continuing her journey to adulthood.

Romans 5:12-21 is also about changing our stories. Beginning with Adam, all humans have been subject to sin and death. The “human condition,” while it allows for many joyous moments, also includes war, economic struggle, disease, and ultimately death, and often seems meaningless. But in this passage Paul forcefully reminds us that Christ came into the world to lead us to eternal life through grace. Many of us believe that we do not have to wait until after death to enjoy that grace; finding a companionship with Jesus can lead us to a state where life, even with the suffering inherent in the human condition, is joyous, fulfilling, and meaningful.

Dorothy changed her story along the Yellow Brick Road and got to a place where she overcame fear. On the road to Damascus, Saul, the author of the Letter to the Romans, had an encounter that changed his story and led him to become Paul, the great missionary for Christ. Even during this year when Covid-19 has kept us from gathering with loved ones, we are still changing our stories and finding joy and grace. May this Lenten Season serve to deepen our companionship with Christ.



Gayle Taylor loves being a member of St. Francis, where she serves as Outreach Minister and participates in Meditation, Nurture Group and Bible Study. A retired teacher, she enjoys cooking, painting, hiking, and travel.

Friday, March 12

Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-20, Psalm 91, Romans 6:1-11, John 8:33-47

I often hear God's voice, and the sound fades quickly. So does the land with milk and honey. I want to hold on to and experience more of the land with milk and honey, but I am not so privileged. This Lenten season I want to appreciate more that I can hear the voice of God, and I need to quiet my voice and stop talking over God so I can let him clean up my mess in my relationships.

I want to live every moment obeying His voice. I sin when I disobey God's voice, and I do not obey his voice because I think I know better, and again the head of Original Sin shows up. God does not withhold an answer to my prayers out of spite, but I sometimes ignore an answer because I will not let Him clean up my mess. I want to clean up my mess, but I must allow Him to help me clean up the mess because I will only continue to sin if I try to clean up the mess my own way, without His guidance. I am so quick to take over when His voice asks me to let Him take care of it, but I keep thinking "I can do it! Let me show you, God." But if I only rely on my own will and my own ways, I only make it worse.

In this Lenten season, I need to stop struggling with God, with God's voice, with God's wants, with God's will, and instead listen and accept His voice, His wants, His will, and peace beyond understanding will be mine in my living, in my death, and resurrection.



Darryl Tillman has been a member of St. Francis for over 25 years. He has ministered in many ways, including Vestry, Diocesan convention, Usher, Friars, St. Luke's, Mama Hill's, Antiques Show, and a host of other fundraising and social events.

Saturday March 13

Jeremiah 13:1-11, Psalm 136, Romans 6:12-23, John 8:47-59

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” Psalm 136:1

This Psalm tells a story we know well. It is the story, first of creation, then the fall into captivity, and finally being led by God to the Promised Land. But what caught my eye was that each line concludes with the antiphon ... *for his steadfast love endures forever*. Psalm 136 is unique in the Bible for including an antiphon that was commonly used in postexilic worship. However, for me the antiphon brought back those days when we worshipped together. The choir would sing a line of psalm or scripture, and the people would respond to each line by singing an antiphon.

My eyes then strayed to the first verse of Psalm 137: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept, and hung our harps on the willows...”* As I read this I could feel the story happening to me, and I wept at the feelings which welled up from inside. I wept because I felt captive to forces beyond my control; world-changing events that have made the simple worship of responsive singing a thing of memory.

How many times has this story played out? A wonderful creation, perhaps not fully appreciated. The subsequent loss and fall into captivity. Finally, the Promised Land and a new beginning. As my heart weeps for what has been lost, I recall the last act of this story, and I wonder what the new world that God is making will look like when it comes.



Albert Zimmerman is a 22-year parishioner at St. Francis and is grateful that those years have been a time of coming closer to God.

Sunday, March 14

...Where there is darkness,
(let me sow) light;
and where there is
sadness, joy.



Monday, March 15

Jeremiah 16:10-21, Psalm 89:19-52, Romans 7:1-12, John 6:1-15

This chapter of John is one of my earliest memories of Christian teaching as a child. I'm pretty sure there was a felt board involved, but I digress. It makes sense that this passage would be a hit amongst the Sunday School set—kids like miracles. In truth, it is a pretty good passage for adults as well.

I remember over the years people suggesting that the passage was evidence for the feeding of stomachs before souls, but that's not exactly what happened here. The crowd of 5000 was following Jesus because they believed in him. He had already gathered this flock; now he was tending it. It also provided Jesus an opportunity to build the faith of his disciples. Poor Phillip (I can relate) failed Jesus's "test" of faith. It doesn't occur to Phillip that Jesus would be just as capable of multiplying the fish and loaves as he was of turning water into wine. Faith takes time.

Christ's miracles served to build the faith of his early followers, giving him a chance to fulfill his ministry. I suspect this story appealed to me so much as a child not just because it was a miracle, but because it was a miracle of caring, of love. Again and again Christ's miracles end suffering. Jesus loves us, this we know, for the Bible tells us so. It tells us so in his words, certainly, but also in his deeds, his healing of the sick, his giving sight to the blind, his feeding the masses, his raising of the dead. Christ provides reassurance that our worst fears of hunger, disease and death have been conquered. Our greatest hopes have been realized and there's fish enough for everyone.



Tim Coleman is an English teacher at Palos Verdes Peninsula High School. He has been a member of St. Francis for the last 6 years and can't wait to return to in-person services.

Tuesday, March 16

Jeremiah 17:19-27, Psalms 94, Romans 7:13-25, John 6:16-27

“When (his disciples) had rowed across (the rough sea because a strong wind was blowing) about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea coming near the boat and they were terrified. But he said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ . . . (A)nd immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.” John 6:19-21

In this famous story, told also in Matthew 14:22-27 and Mark 6:47-51, Jesus reveals his divine nature by walking on water, and he comes to the aid of his disciples who were in trouble.

Based on this Gospel, it is clear that Jesus helps his followers when they are in need. An aspect of the story that should not be overlooked, however, is that the disciples themselves rowed the boat, both during the storm and afterwards. While Jesus, by his power, calmed the waters, the disciples brought the boat to land. Thus, I believe that while Jesus will do his part in helping those in need, his followers must also do their part. It is a collaborative effort.

I happened to be Senior Warden in November 2006 when our Rector Dean Farrar retired. I remember saying to myself as the final reception for Dean concluded, “We are just like a ship that has left port, but I do not know where we are headed.” However, the next Sunday at 8:00 a.m., when organist Ray Urwin started the processional hymn, Vestry member Laurie Anderson started down the aisle holding up the cross, and Fr. Michael Cooper—whom the Church had retained as its Supply Priest with the assistance of the Diocese—followed, I felt much more confident, and said to myself, “We can do this.” No doubt the power and spirit of our Lord helped St. Francis during that transition, but the parishioners of St. Francis did their part, too.

St. Francis is in the midst of another transition, no doubt made more challenging because of COVID. But there is no reason to be worried or afraid of any future uncertainty for two reasons: First, the power and spirit of our Lord Jesus is with us; and second, we have many loyal, faithful and capable parishioners who will do their best to make the transition successful.



Richard Briggs is a life-long Episcopalian from Chicago, Illinois. He has been a member of the Parish for almost forty years. He is married to Sara Schulz, whom he met through the Church, and has two sons from a prior marriage and two step-sons.

Wednesday, March 17

Jeremiah 18:1-11, Psalm 119:121-144, Romans 8:1-11, John 6:27-40

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’” John 6:32-33

My grandmother’s brother – Voldemars “Valdis” Librechts – was 21 when he was ripped from his home in the middle of the night and taken to a concentration camp in Siberia. He managed to get a hold of note pads, and over the course of several years in that concentration camp, he wrote journal entries detailing the pain, hunger, and uncertainty of life as a captive.

In reading through his journals a few years ago, two entries in particular stood out to me. The first (which I am translating in my vernacular as I don’t have them before me now) reads, “I was more desperate than a stray dog, hoping for just one small scrap of bread so that I may survive the day.” He also wrote, “You don’t realize how much you love someone until you have a stale piece of bread and you are starving, yet you share it.” My grandmother, who was fortunate enough to escape the same fate as Valdis and their parents, would weep whenever she’d recount these words to me, for it cut her deeply that she was spared from that fate, able to flee to Argentina to begin a new life and ultimately make her way to America.

The second entry that left an impact on me is where he wrote “Life is beautiful” at the top of the page, and began a fresh entry: “No matter the hardship, no matter the atrocity, no matter whether or not I am ever able to return to Latvia, I hope to keep this belief in the forefront of my mind so that I may always live my life in this manner, believing that life is in fact beautiful.”

My great-uncle was a man of faith, and I believe it was his faith and his deep hope that he would someday return to his beloved Latvia that sustained him through the dozen years he was held captive. Though he lacked literal bread, he did not lack the bread from heaven. In fact, he relied on it as though his life depended on it ... because it did.



Kristina Pelá’s parents were born in Latvia, and as children, they fled with their families at the onset of World War II. She is grateful for the legacy of faith prior generations demonstrated, even in the face of horrible atrocities.

Thursday, March 18

Jeremiah 22:13-23, Psalm 73, Romans 8:12-27, John 6:41-51

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Psalm 73:26

Today a friend asked me, “How do we walk this somber time without falling into the abyss?” Great question! And I was blessed to find a viable answer in an unexpected place: my daughter’s last Instagram post. She wrote the following on December 31, 2020:

“An open love letter to 2020:

Thank you for the disappointments you brought as they taught me to adapt in unforeseen circumstances.

Thank you for the canceled plans as they taught me to cherish memories of the past.

Thank you for masks as they have taught me the importance of a warm smile.

Thank you for reminding me how precious Joy and Love are.

Thank you for family and all of the time we were able to spend together.

Thank you for the health we too often take for granted.

Thank you for the start of college and the exciting steps toward the future.

Thank you for the new additions to my life I am blessed to call friends.

Thank you for each of these individuals as they each contribute something special.

Thank you for life despite its ups and downs.

Thank you for the new appreciation I have developed for the lows, as I know I am being further shaped.

Thank you for sunrises and the beginning of a fresh day.

Thank you for sunsets as the perfect seal to each.

Thank you for the stars and the wonder of this world.

Thank you for the fresh air and each breath that is poured into our lungs by grace.

Thank you for the many life lessons, the heartfelt memories, the exponential growth, and the daily reminder that God is forever good.”

Contd. on next page...

Thursday, March 18 Contd.

Jeremiah 22:13-23, Psalm 73, Romans 8:12-27, John 6:41-51

I'm struck by the repeated "Thank You" statements, especially for things that, at face value, didn't seem inherently good. She discovered the good that emerged from them, no matter how great the disappointments or how deep the hurts.

As you encounter somber times, may God be the strength of your heart and your portion forever so that you, too, can trust that thanksgivings will ultimately arise from them.



Kristina Pelá and her husband Fabrizio joined St. Francis in 2000. Kristina relishes serving as Pastoral Care Shepherd and looks forward to discerning "what's next" as an empty nester, now that Tavio (21) and Sofia (18) are away in college.

Friday, March 19

Isaiah 63:7-16, Psalm 34, Ephesians 3:14-41, Matthew 1:18-25

“Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or even imagine.” Ephesians 3:20

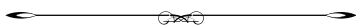
After reading over the scripture passages that were assigned for this day, Ephesians 3:20 is what stayed with me. This, or a version of it, is the verse that Paula+ has always used before she preaches and at other times, too. It has always been a meaningful and beautiful passage for me.

As an adult, there have always been events in my life that I wanted to “control.” Sometimes the events were pleasant events, and sometimes they were not pleasant—it doesn’t seem to matter. I thought about all the different ways that the situation could unfold. Then, after coming up with all the different ways I could think of, I would pick the one way that I thought it would happen and I anticipated it actually happening that way. I tried to “control” it happening that way.

I would say that it rarely, if ever, happened the way that I had anticipated. And the truth is, that how it DID happen was always the way it was supposed to happen. It happened in ways that I never would have asked for or even imagined.

As I have realized this, it has helped me to try to control things less and to “let go and let God.” I truly believe that things will unfold as they are supposed to and the more that we can trust God’s power within us, we are able to accomplish more than we might ask or even imagine. It takes a lot of the pressure off!

I also will always think of Paula+ when I hear or see this passage!



Joyce Alley is a cradle Episcopalian and attended St. Francis growing up. She lived in Indiana for 32 years and has been back in California and St. Francis for 4 years. She and her husband Chris are thrilled to be here!

Saturday, March 20

Jeremiah 23:9-15, Psalm 33, Romans 9:1-18, John 6:60-71

Psalms seem to sound like music or poetry for me, and many of their words have been set to music. Being a musician, I also find solace in times of stress, by the rhythm and the alliteration, not just the meaning of the words. In Psalm 33, I was struck by how timely the theme related to today.

I'm moved by words like "Rejoice," "Praise," and "sing a new song." I'm moved by phrases like "the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" and "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth."

I can see that image in my mind's eye.

I see the earth being made—such a powerful image that God uses his words to build.

As I continued to read, I realized how we could take these words into our heart and be refreshed by their meaning. *"Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in Him, because we trust in His holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you."*

Taking these positive images into my heart and soul relieves and calms me. Here is our God who created our universe. Whom we trust and praise His holy name. How He makes Himself known in times of uncertainty. These words ring of calmness and joy.

I take heart in God's belief that we are worthy of His faith. We take our faith in Him and can go forward even now. Thank you, God, for being ever in our thoughts and prayers. You give us hope. Even now at these crazy times.

"Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you."

Susie Zimmerman has been at St. Francis for 22 years. The ministry closest to her heart is for our military, who need our prayers and boxes of love so they can do the job they need to do to keep us safe. She is grateful for this church family, who keep her going forward with their kindness and love.

Sunday, March 21

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not
so much seek
to be consoled
as to console;
to be understood
as to understand;



Monday, March 22

Jeremiah 24:1-10, Psalm 35, Romans 9: 19-33, John 9: 1-17

How often are your reserves of grace, intelligence, fortitude, and fortune really tested? I bet right now, after several months of the COVID pandemic, you could say, “All the time!”

Whether we are helping our children or grandchildren complete their lessons on Zoom, dealing with the difficulties of getting vaccines or even routine healthcare, or struggling with keeping a business going during a pandemic, this year has brought more than its share of struggles. On the national front, conflict has loomed large this year, and many of us have worked hard to maintain friendships while disagreeing with loved ones over fundamental economic and political principles. How are we going to move forward in peace and harmony?

At a time like this, it is easy to blame God for our problems. If God is in charge, why has He made the way so difficult? Cynicism is the easy way out, and I have to admit that there are days when I am cynical and nasty, eager to outsource my issues to other people or to a God who has forgotten how to care. But that is not the answer. Two thousand years ago, Paul addressed this issue quite forcefully, writing in the NRSV of the Bible, “*Who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?*” This is a call not just to be humble but to reckon with our connection to a larger picture. And indeed, the passage goes on to talk about “stumbling blocks” that get in the way of a lack of trust in God. For me those stumbling blocks are envy, arrogance, and complacency.

But in Romans, Paul also points out that when people have problems, they also end up finding God in unexpected places, in the stumbling blocks in their lives. The story in John, about a man blind from birth who is suddenly allowed to see because Christ takes pity on him, complements the verses from Romans. In this time of trial, of stumbling blocks that seem bigger than our ability to overcome them, may we find God in some unexpected ways.



Gayle Taylor loves being a member of St. Francis, where she serves as Outreach Minister and participates in Meditation, Nurture Group and Bible Study. A retired teacher, she enjoys cooking, painting, hiking, and travel.

Tuesday, March 23

Jeremiah 25:8-17, Psalm 124, Romans 10:1-13, John 9:18-41

This Psalm of David assures me that the Lord has my back. He has had my back when I have been confronted with people who have risen up against me. Furthermore, the Lord has had my back when my own actions have put me in positions of danger, even when I have done something foolish.

When I was six or seven years old, unknown to me, the Lord was with me when I carelessly blindfolded myself and pedaled my tricycle into an intersection where cars often speeded through. No harm came to me, in spite of my foolish actions.

Once, while walking to work across a busy street, I watched the pedestrian signal switch from “Don’t Walk” to “Walk,” but I thoughtlessly started walking across the wrong street! I heard brakes squeal as a huge truck barreled toward me while I was in the crosswalk. I looked straight ahead. I did not quite realize just how close I had come to being killed. Later that day I started thinking about this incident and began shaking.

The Lord was with me that day.

The Lord had my back when I recklessly slid down an icy glacier for hundreds of feet with an uncertain fate amid boulders. The Lord helped me use my wits to avoid injury, safely bouncing a few times before coming, unhurt, to a stop.

On one occasion I managed to get my car stuck in the mountains, and tow trucks I called developed problems on their own. I appreciated their efforts to move my car, but at one point the driver of the second tow truck threatened to kill me. We rode back to the garage in one truck, leaving one behind. My car blocked, I faced an uncertain future in getting my car out of the mountains. The Lord, again with me, manifested Himself by assuring me that there are always options. I called another towing service which drove back into the mountains and pulled my car around the first tow truck. I “escaped as a bird out of the snare” (Verse 7, Psalm 124).



Joe Young counts his friendship with St. Francis parishioner Gayle Taylor as one of his many blessings. They share many interests, especially reflecting on Biblical passages and their meaning today. They also share love for the outdoors, live theatre, travel, and space.

Wednesday, March 24

Jeremiah 25:30-38, Psalm 128, Romans 10:14-21, John 10:1-18

I read all the readings for today, and Romans 10:14-21 spoke to me the clearest. The reading begins with, *“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”*

These three questions seem to point to our faith and where we are in this great journey called life. It speaks about how God really wants us to be saved. He is there even when we are disobedient and think we know all the answers. God will always love us and always be available for us to turn to him. How nice to hear this good news! We have all had the ups and downs of life and can lean on our faith to celebrate or get through difficult times. There is a line from the Santa Clause movie that goes, “Seeing isn’t believing; believing is seeing.” Every time I hear that, I immediately think of God.

I would like for all of us to take a moment...a deep breath in...a deep breath out. We are each on a journey, and no matter how close or far away we feel from God, He is always there to pick up right where you left off.



Alyce, Michael (husband), and Ryan (son) Metzroth have been part of St. Francis Church since July 2016. Alyce is on the Vestry, helps with the St. Luke's Food for the Homeless, and Sunday School Team. She still plans to travel to Spain someday in the future.

Thursday, March 25

Isaiah 7:10-14, Psalm 45, Hebrews 10:4-10, Luke 1:26-38

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’” Luke 1:38

This reading from the Gospel of Luke is the Annunciation of Mary. As I child, I was trying to figure out why Mary was able to say “yes” to the angel Gabriel to be part of this incredible birth journey. How would this work? As I got older and revisited this story every Christmas, singing the beautiful music telling her story, I saw there was grace in the music and in the words that she was given. She seemed so courageous ... how?

I loved singing, “Mary said ‘yes’” and missed it when we did not sing it that year. I wondered how this grace helped her to see that “yes.”

What God wanted her to do seemed a little bit more possible.

Mary’s heart was open, and she heard the request from God. She believed that God would fit it all together, and how she was needed.

Perhaps if I had an announcement from God through someone, so clear and startling, could I hear it and receive this grace? If I was open enough to hear an angel, could I be open enough to say “yes?”

I do know that God has spoken to me through other people I did not even know. Would I know how God fit things that seem impossible together? Looking for that eager and hopeful faith.

I was so happy to see Elizabeth was pregnant, too, and how wonderful it was for Mary to have someone older to share her pregnancy. What a gift that was, so Mary was not alone.

God fits things together. Trying to remember this when things are impossible. That God is there, and I could listen like Mary.



Susie Zimmerman is so grateful she took the chance to be part of Education for Ministry and learn to speak from her heart.

Friday March 26

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-13, Psalm 141, Romans 11:13-24, John 12:1-10

In John 12:1-10, we find Jesus in Bethany visiting the house of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead, and sharing a meal with Martha, Mary and others. The event is described as being quite ordinary, which is further proof of Lazarus being miraculously back to good health. Mary then is seen anointing Jesus' feet with very expensive perfume, and Judas Iscariot objects, stating that a better use for such a prized possession would be to sell it and give the money to the poor. John comments that Judas did not really care for the poor and may have in fact wanted to get his hands on that money as he had done in the past with the common purse. But Jesus rebukes Judas and declares that Mary's actions are proper, even foreshadowing his imminent death.

There is so much going on in this short passage. We are reminded of Jesus' extraordinary healing powers, powers so great that a man was raised from the dead and is nonchalantly having a perfectly commonplace dinner with his friends. In the background, crowds are gathering because of such miracles, which is a grave concern to the chief priests who are plotting against Jesus. We also witness the extravagant love for Jesus, as expressed by Mary with her act of reverence and indulgent giving. Mary perhaps has a premonition of what will happen to Jesus because her gesture is similar to the act of embalming a body for burial.

Judas' intrusion into this idyllic setting gives us a glimpse into his cold, hypocritical heart, outwardly professing concern for the poor while his motivations are otherwise. A reminder to "beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them" in Matthew 6. And finally, Jesus speaks - yes, the poor are to be helped and that is indeed an enduring instruction, but this particular moment is to be treasured, because soon there will not be another opportunity to show such respect in a very deliberate and physical way. So I pray for renewed awareness of our wonderful and fleeting Jesus moments.



Fabrizio Pelá has been at St. Francis for 21 years. He and his wife Kristina enjoy connecting with the wonderful people of this blessed church community and receiving spiritual nourishment that helps to keep life's challenges in perspective.

Saturday March 27

Jeremiah 31:27-34, Psalm 42, Romans 11:25-36, John 11:28-44

“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” John 11:40-42

I love miracles, and this one seems like one of the most spectacular. In the last half of this passage, Jesus relieves the anguish that Mary and Martha are experiencing because of the death of their beloved Lazarus by bringing him back to life. But he also uses it as a teaching moment for Mary, making the point that we all need to internalize: “...if you believe, you would see the glory of God.”

This passage triggered three thoughts for me:

I am a doubter by nature (a mathematician by training) and I like the tangibility of the miracles as evidence that Jesus had the power to do God’s will. I think I would have been one of those in the crowd that Jesus wanted to be sure heard as he thanked God for hearing him, so we would know that it was really God making it happen through Jesus.

The miracle itself provided a reminder for me that God provides for life after death – maybe not in the literal sense that Lazarus came back to life, but I think Jesus is using this example to emphasize that there is life after death if you believe. While it’s not something I think about often, it provides comfort in knowing that we all eventually move on to a new life in God’s kingdom.

It also made me pause to think that I sometimes wonder if God is listening... to me... and to what’s happening in the world. Jesus reminds us here that of course God is always hearing. He is hearing everything, and I should not expect to always recognize his hand in things, but by the same token should be sure to thank him just as Jesus does. This is something I feel I can work on, especially during Lent: to be more thankful for all the blessings that God has provided me.

Robin Pano is a life-long Episcopalian. She grew up in Chicago suburbs, moved to California and joined St. Francis in the early 90s. She is a semi-retired consultant, Goodwill Board member, has two grown daughters, and loves hiking, sports, outdoor activities and traveling.

Sunday,
March 28

... to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving
that we receive,



Monday March 29

Jeremiah 12:1-16, Psalm 69:1-23, Philippians 3:1-14, John 12:9-19

“Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?” Jeremiah 12:1

“And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them, and I will bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land.” Jeremiah 12:15

“But if any nation will not listen, then I will utterly pluck it up and destroy it, declares the Lord.” Jeremiah 12:17

These three passages jumped out at me as I read Jeremiah 12:1-17. Yes, I, too, have asked the same questions. How does one “love and forgive” people who have behaved egregiously? I have read many answers and interpretations on love and forgiveness. None previously spoke to my heart as effectively as these have.

We all make mistakes at some point in our lives. Thank God, we are forgiven over and over. Our behaviors have consequences. It is best to learn from these mistakes and become a kinder and gentler person.

As for the people behaving badly, knowingly or unknowingly, truth always seems to have a way of coming out. God will deal with them. It is not necessary for me to fret.



HeeSun Gerhardt's family has been attending St. Francis Episcopal Church since 1997. Her “proudest” accomplishment was the establishment of potluck lunches for our Annual Meetings as ECW President. Up until then, ECW members prepared the entire lunch—“homemade”—in the church kitchen. HeeSun says she is “not too swift in the kitchen;” thus came about the Mitford Potluck Lunch. God puts even our weaknesses to good use!

Tuesday, March 30

Jeremiah 15:10-21, Psalm 94, Philippians 3:15-21, John 12:20-26

Sometimes in reading scripture, a line will stick out and you cannot help but focus your mind on that line. The line for me was in Philippians. It was *“Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

This is always what I am thinking about when I am my busiest or stressed out here on earth. My focus on these earthly things is sometimes too much to handle. I often get so focused on the earthly things that do not matter; I forget that we are all awaiting our citizenship in heaven, not here on earth. I am too busy trying to achieve the next goal or make the next pay raise or conquer some earthly achievement. We are all just buying time down here on earth when in fact our true issue or focus should be on the pearly gates.

I sometimes feel badly that I did not treat my neighbor as myself or give generously as the Bible teaches. *“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.”* I often strive to be a better earthly human by not focusing on earthly things and focusing more on giving to others as my earthly possessions will be of little use in the next life.



Michael Metzroth, his wife Alyce, and their son Ryan Metzroth have been attending St. Francis since summer of 2016. Due to COVID, they have been enjoying the Holy Eucharist from home via Facebook live every Sunday morning.

Wednesday, March 31

Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-7, Psalm 74, Philippians 4:1-13, John 12:27-36

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” Philippians 4:4

I love this verse. I was in college when I first heard there were 4 ways to pray. The acronym ACTS was to help us remember: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Up to this point I thought prayer was only about asking for forgiveness or something specific. The idea of thanksgiving was a newer concept to me. What was I truly thankful for?

Easy ones came to mind like my family, my friends, and my home. As I have gotten older, I am thankful for so much more. When I wake and see the sun and the birds singing, I am thankful. When Alex makes my bowl of cereal, I am thankful. When I drive to work, I am thankful my car started and I got to work safely. I am thankful for choosing the teaching profession, and watching the concentration on a student's face and the excitement when the light bulb goes off in their minds. I am thankful for my legs that take me through the hills of Palos Verdes and to the ocean below. At night, I am thankful for the peace and quiet as I fall to sleep. That is when I thank God for every little and big thing in my life.

During this time of Covid, so many people think of the negative, the illness, death, despair, and the unknown. I, too, have these worries. But, I am thankful every day. There is hope, happiness, and positivity around us. I am thankful to wake up every morning feeling healthy. I am thankful for the people who created Zoom. I have bonded and gotten to know some students in a way I wouldn't have with in-person school. At Christmas, I was still with my family, just in a different way. I am thankful for the workers who show up at Vons so I can feed my family. I am thankful for more together time with my kids and husband. I have started quilting and I am thankful for the creative outlet. I am even thankful when my kids beat me at cards.

Go out today and rejoice in the big and little things in your life. It's all glory to God.



Jennifer Sams lives in Redondo Beach with her 3 kids (when they aren't off in college,) her amazing husband, and a menagerie of animals. She loves to travel, read, knit, sew, play games, and take walks. She appreciates this devotional booklet, as it is a highlight of her Lent, seeing our church family in a new or different light.

Maundy Thursday, April 1

Isaiah 52:13–53:12, Psalm 22, Hebrews 10:16–25, Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9, John 18:1–19:42

“Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.”

Psalm 143:8

I am now an empty nester. After spending the past 2 decades as a “stay home” mom doing the typical cooking, cleaning, carpooling, volunteering at the kids’ schools, sporting events, fundraisers and St. Francis, I have become very accustomed to maintaining a detailed “To Do” list. As an empty nester, however, the vast majority of the tasks aren’t urgent; the needs aren’t as pressing. But I find that I still let the “To Do” list dictate my days (or at least my mood), and I when I do that, I focus on what is left undone, which puts me in what I’ll call a crabby mood.

Ironically, as my time has become more freed up, my mind has not. Could it be because my spending time with God has fallen by the wayside? How and when did I let that happen? After reaching out to Him multiple times a day to guide me through the challenges of parenting children—not to mention teenagers—how is it that I have now carelessly allowed that significant relationship to stagnate?

So for Lent I’ve decided to give up letting my “To Do” list dictate my mood and my days. I’m giving up checking my phone first thing or hurrying to my computer to get through e-mails asap, telling myself “Oh, I’ll touch base with God later” but then never get around to it.

Instead, I will put God first in my morning routine. I will read the Bible verses for each day and take the time to sit with the scriptures and contemplate what they mean for me instead of rushing through this discipline so I can “check it off of my To Do list” with an “Okay, that’s done, on with my day” mindset. I will practice lectio divina, journal, and then, only after listening to what God’s plans are for me, move on to my texts, e-mails and “To Do” tasks and see how they may fall into line with His plans for my day instead of the other way around.



Kristina Pelá was so struck by the warmth, simplicity and “open abandon” of this verse that she intends to incorporate its recitation into her daily routine long after Lent has passed.

Good Friday, April 2

Isaiah 52:13–53:12, Psalm 22, Hebrews 10:16–25, Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9, John 18:1–19:42

I struggle each year with Good Friday and being reminded of the injustices and torturous death experienced by Jesus. It causes me to recoil for several reasons.

It is partially due to an experience I had when I was a teenager attending an ecumenical Youth Encounter event. One evening included a movie detailing all the injuries Jesus sustained based on an analysis of his burial shroud. There was a lot of emotion in the room during the movie and at the end, we had to be escorted out so an exorcism could be performed on a female attendee who had been afflicted during the screening. My takeaway—if that sort of thing can result from a focus on Jesus's suffering, I don't want any part of it.

Second, I am an emotional guy and feel it in my gut when I see wrongs committed or have to re-watch sad endings. While I understand the importance of seeing and confronting the truth of what has occurred, once is enough for me.

Finally, I am wary of placing an over emphasis on Jesus's death and the idea he had to die for our sins to be forgiven. I believe we have an almighty, merciful God who does not desire sacrifice but rather is calling us into a loving relationship and looking for us to be good stewards of the grace we have received.

In that vein, I have adapted the way I think about Good Friday based on a concept outlined by Richard Rohr (Roman Catholic priest and Franciscan friar) in his book *The Universal Christ*. To paraphrase, Rohr suggests when we consider the image of the crucified Jesus we allow it to soften our heart towards all suffering, understand the role we may sometimes play, realize we are forgiven, and turn back to the way of love Jesus taught us. This notion has helped me to re-focus what I know of Jesus's suffering into constructive action.

I hope you find it helpful too.



Jack Hailwood is a “cradle Episcopalian” who has been attending St. Francis Church since June 2018 with his wife, Frances. They have two children ages 25 and 24.

Holy Saturday, April 3

Job 14:1-14, Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16, 1Peter 4:1-8, Matthew 27: 57-66

It seems as if we have all been waiting for such a long time, and we have. We have been in our homes in front of the screens for a year. Holy Saturday is about waiting.

Matthew tells us that as Joseph of Arimathea and friends took the body of Jesus, wrapped it in clean linen, laid it in his own tomb and then rolled the stone to close the tomb, “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.” And then their torturous waiting began.

All Jews had to be home before sundown for the Sabbath. The women would have had to hurry home. They had to wait all through Friday night and the Sabbath meal, all through the long empty Saturday, waiting all Saturday night until first light to be able to see their way to the tomb. Holy Saturday is a lonely, empty time, waiting, mourning, grieving.

Jesus said again and again that he would die and in three days rise, but did they really believe or even remember that? Would you? They saw him tortured; they saw him die. They wait and then hurry to the tomb to tend the body and say goodbye.

We know the story. We know the tomb will be empty. We know Jesus lives!

But, I think we tend to miss the significance of this Saturday part of the story, the emptiness and agony of those who waited and waited. I might liken it to the soldier who learns of the death of his father and it takes two days to get home. Something important happens, quietly, inside the heart, during those two days. Something deepens, love grows in the pain of it, priorities shift in the wake of memories.

Tonight, at the Vigil, our history will be recalled, our baptismal vows renewed, and we will ring in the first light of Easter with bells. For today, let us deepen in love as we wait for the mystery of the risen Christ to unfold.



From Rev Jude: I write this in January, not knowing what will have led up to this Holy Saturday in our own lives, in our own church. I hold all of you in my heart. In the stillness of this moment, I wish you a Holy Saturday of quiet reflection, and may tomorrow burst forth into a triumphant Easter!!

Easter Sunday,
April 4

...it is in pardoning
that we are pardoned
and it is in dying
that we are born
to eternal life.



Holy Week and Easter Dates

Palm Sunday

Sunday, March 28

Maundy Thursday

Thursday, April 1

Good Friday

Friday, April 2

The Great Vigil of Easter

Saturday, April 3

Easter Day

Sunday, April 4

Contributors: *The people of St. Francis*

Editor: *Kristina Pelá The Rev. Jude Lyons*

Assistant Editor: *The Rev. Jude Lyons*

Designer: *Susan Marshall*

Sunday Quotes - The Prayer of St. Francis

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St Francis Episcopal Church,

2200 Via Rosa, Palos Verdes, CA 90274, 310 375-4617.

www.stfrancispalosverdes.org