

Trinity Presbyterian Church

Daily
Devotions for Lent



Epigraph

Lent invites us to make our hearts ready for remembering Jesus' passion and celebrating Jesus' resurrection. ... As a period of preparation, Lent has historically included the instruction of persons for baptism and profession of faith on Easter Sunday; the calling back of those who have become estranged from the church; and efforts by all Christians to deepen their piety, devotion, and readiness to mark the death and resurrection of their Savior. As such, the primary focus of the season is to explore and deepen a "baptismal spirituality" that centers on our union with Christ rather than to function only as an extended meditation on Christ's suffering and death.

- Emily Brink and John D. Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook*, pages 551-552



Introduction to the Lenten Devotional 2024

The Reverend Dr. Gregory C. Faulkner

The heart. We use the word to convey different things. Biologically, we cannot live without a functioning heart; it is one of our body's organs that is essential, to say the very least. The beating heart is carrying life throughout our physical bodies. The word is also how we usually speak of the seat of our emotions. We say to someone "I love you with all my heart." We call those dear to us "Sweetheart." In the Arab world, one of the most common terms of affection is to call someone "My heart!"

As Ash Wednesday begins the Lenten observance in the Western Church, it will be February 14, St. Valentine's Day—a day characterized by red hearts being festooned all over stores and cards and television commercials. The heart-shaped image conveys thoughts of love, desire, and commitment; it has become a universal symbol as the 23(!) different heart emojis on our phones indicate. To speak of heart, whether physical or symbolic, is to speak of life and, in turn, love.

Lent is about life and love.

Lent is about life and love because the several weeks in which we journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter are weeks to consider what it means to love God by following Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Lent is simply a time we now give to attempting to practice our faith more conscientiously. Setting aside a particular season for greater cultivation of faith, hope, and love really bothered our Reformed fore-parents. They eschewed such practices because they believed that every day was a day for repentance and renewal . . . every hour was the time to focus on loving God and our neighbors.

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This Lenten Devotional is a gift given to each of us by fellow sisters and brothers who have taken the time to share their thoughts—and their hearts—with us. My thanks to each and every writer is deep. Susan Bastnagel has again given many hours to the editing of this volume and our Office Manager, Alysia Sieh Badskey, has made sure that the booklet was produced with beauty. Susan and Alysia have put their hearts into the project. (See what I did there?) I know that is the case because they have given time and care and thought to the production of our Lenten Devotional 2024.

Throughout this Lenten season, we will sing the words composed by Richard Robinson more than 250 years ago. Robinson had lived a difficult childhood and youth and then came to faith in Christ. As happens to most of us, Robinson hit a rough patch during his adult years and felt he was a great distance from the God he loved. He ends his well-loved hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” with a prayer: *Take my heart, O take and seal it/Seal it for thy courts above.* That is a deeply Biblical prayer—just look at the Psalms and the Prophets. That is a prayer that our Reformed ancestors would have been glad to offer every day. It is a prayer that I believe characterizes so much of what you are holding in your hands right now.

Lent is about life and love. It is about the heart—the one beating in your chest and the one that represents your feelings and your volition, your dedication and your love. Lent is about the living of the Christian life, and I dare say there is no better prayer for us to make more deeply our own than to pray to the Lord Jesus: *Take my heart! O take and seal it as belonging to you alone.*

May this Lenten Devotional play an important part in our giving our hearts more willingly and truly to the God we love!

Gregory



Day 1

ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2024

Psalm 119:10

With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments.

Come, thou Fount of every blessing;
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above;
praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of God's unchanging love!

Here I raise my Ebenezer;
hither by thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
interposed his precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it for the courts above.

A short time after Robert Robinson (born 1735) was converted, he wrote the text for this hymn. Years later Robinson, who had spent much of his youth in a rough gang roaming the streets of London, began to turn to his old ways and he wandered away from God. In a spiritually sad state, Robinson was traveling in a stagecoach with his only companion, a

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young woman unknown to him. Unaware of to whom she was speaking, the woman quoted *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, saying what an encouragement it had been to her. Robinson attempted to change the subject numerous times, yet the unknown woman would not move from the topic. She asked him what he thought of the hymn she was humming. He responded, “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then.” The story goes that with great tenderness, she gently replied, “Sir, the ‘streams of mercy’ are still flowing.” He was deeply touched by her words. As a result of the encounter he turned back to Christ and again asked God to take his heart and seal it for the heavenly courts. What amazing grace! The hymn-writer, Robert Robinson, found his relationship with the Lord restored through the ministry of his own hymn through a fellow Christian’s willing witness.

Our Lenten season is a time to consider how we are “prone to wander from the God we love.” It’s a time to attempt a greater and more lasting honesty that, though we do love the God we have met in Jesus Christ, we still are “prone to wander,” to go our own way, leaving aside God’s will and ways. As these weeks stretch out toward Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, we are given the grace to ask the Lord to take our hearts and seal them for the courts above—that is, to mark them as belonging to God and his divine Kingdom.

Prayer: O Christ, with my whole heart I seek You. Lessen my tendency to roam from Your grace. Take my heart, Lord. Take it and mark it as yours now and forevermore. Hear this, my prayer, and all for Your great love’s sake. Amen.

Greg Faulkner

Day 2

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024

Hebrews 12:2

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Attaining joy is something I think about often. However, I have come to believe there is a difference between joy and happiness. Many things in my life bring me happiness: my family (especially my seven grandchildren), my dear friends with whom I have been in a book club for 20 years, my art class, my reflections of my teaching career, holidays and celebrations, my new membership in Trinity, and the women in my Circle. While all these relationships and experiences create happy memories, I realize that happiness is not always sustainable.

But joy is different. For me true joy comes from a relationship with Jesus, a relationship that needs to be nurtured daily. I attempt this through reading my daily devotional and the scriptures, listening to music, sitting quietly, or talking to Jesus in prayer, knowing He is always listening. We need to know God personally and grow in that relationship. As believers, we are called to pursue this relationship.

“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, let not the mighty boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth. For in these I delight,” declares the Lord. (Jer 9:23-24)

Lent is a good time to reflect on our relationship with Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to seek you daily to continue in my relationship with you, to obtain the sustainable joy only You can provide. Amen.

Gail Lunetta

Day 3

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2024

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

During Advent, I love hearing Handel's *Messiah*. I feel as if it takes all the emotions of the season and gives them words. In Part 1 of the music, Isaiah 9:6 is sung by the chorus. All those voices together, proclaiming God's word, fills my soul.

I know that we just finished Christmas and all the busyness that goes along with it. I know that we are to start focusing on Christ's life and what his sacrifice means to us on a personal level. However, I believe that we should not lose the wonder and joy that accompanies his birth. Why shouldn't we keep Isaiah's words in our hearts and minds as we move toward Easter? Why can't we hold tight to feelings that are produced upon hearing about a safe figure in our corner, that will be there forever?

He is someone to whom we can talk about anything and everything in our minds, hearts, and lives, someone who relates to us on such a personal level because He has lived it also. It gives me such comfort during this time of reflection to know that Jesus lived here on Earth and can give me all that I need.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you truly are my Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Amen.

Michele Strobel

Day 4

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2024

Philippians 3:10-11

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

My song is love unknown, my Savior's love to me;
love to the loveless shown, That they might lovely be.
O who am I, that for my sake
my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

He came from heaven's throne salvation to bestow;
but people scorned, and none the longed-for Christ would know.
But O, my Friend, my Friend indeed,
who at my need His life did spend!

Sometimes they strew His way, and His sweet praises sing;
resounding all the day hosannas to their King.
Then 'Crucify!' is all their breath,
and for His death they thirst and cry.

They rise, and needs will have my dear Lord made away;
a murderer they save, the Prince of Life they slay.
Yet steadfast He to suffering goes,
that He His foes from thence might free.

Here might I stay and sing: no story so divine;
never was love, dear King, never was grief like Thine!
This is my Friend, in Whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.

My Song Is Love Unknown is a hymn by the British Puritan minister, Samuel Crossman (1623-1683). Written in 1664; it is very often used as a hymn for Good Friday. The hymn tune to which it is usually sung is called *Love Unknown*, which is by John Ireland (1879–1962). Crossman served both a Puritan congregation and an Anglican congregation, at a time when these two parties were at great disagreement about theology and worship. Due to his Puritan

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leanings, he was expelled from the Anglican Church and it was during this time that he wrote the hymn summarizing the Passion of Christ. In 1665, he eschewed Puritan theology and was re-ordained a priest in the Anglican Church and was made a royal chaplain to King Charles II.

This 17th century hymn is known for the beauty of its language; some modern hymnologists lament the updates of hymnal editors, worried that the edits remove some of Crossman's nuance. The song, like many of our Holy Week hymns, paints for us the story of God's Incarnation and Passion. The hymn invites us to call Jesus by the names: Savior, Christ, Prince of Life, and King; with tenderness, the author helps us to also name Jesus as our Friend, the Friend "in Whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend." Perhaps spending some time praising the Lord would be a good practice for us to practice more.

Prayer: Jesus, You are my Savior and my Messiah. You are the Prince of Life and King of my life. Because you have given all for me and my salvation, I know that you are also my truest Friend. Help me, in my life, to praise you. When the day begins, let your praise be on my lips. As I go through my day, help me to whisper your praises in the quietness of my heart. When the day is done, let my heart sing your praise. And may I be singing when this earthly day is done and I join the heavenly host in singing your "sweet praise, my Friend, my Friend indeed." Amen.

Greg Faulkner

Day 5

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, FEBRUARY 18, 2024

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Day 6

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2024

Hebrews 1:10-12

Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

As I approached retirement at the end of June 2023, the April 30 service at Trinity resonated with me. It was a time when I was still wrestling with moving into a new phase of life. Even though the service was designed to celebrate Trinity's graduating seniors, its content was relevant and reassuring for anyone going through life changes. The prayer of adoration began, "God of love, you are with us in every transition and change." The prayer and the celebration reminded me of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus' quote "change is the only constant in life" and to begin to welcome the change. Heraclitus (fl. c. 500 BCE) created doctrines around the constant change and flux of life, and he lived in Ephesus.

Heraclitus' quote and his work generally have become something of a cliché, but, like many clichés, it expresses a commonplace reality of life. What it doesn't acknowledge is the one constant in our lives. I picture the Apostle Paul arriving in Ephesus centuries later (c. 52 CE) to spread the Good News of Jesus' love and constancy. Paul's message to the people of Ephesus comprehensively contradicts Heraclitus: that all who receive Jesus and believe in his name become children of God. By believing in him, all people everywhere enjoy true, eternal life in the name of Jesus.

As we go through every transition and change in our lives, we nevertheless know that there is one constant: the love of Jesus Christ and his message of eternal life.

Quoting the entire **Prayer of Adoration** from the April 30 service: "God of love, you are with us in every transition and change. As we enter into this new era with excitement and even some anxiety, we recall your deep compassion, presence, and abounding love. We thank you for the gifts, talents, and skills with which you have blessed us. We thank you for the experiences that have brought us into this moment. We thank you for the work of others that gives breadth and depth to our own work. Be with us as we move forward, rejoicing with you and supporting one another. We ask this in your Holy Name. Amen."

Margery Sly

Day 7

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2024

Isaiah 40:8

The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

As I look out my window, I see a dreary sky and dry leaves blowing across my yard. The flowers in my deck pots are dead and looking forlorn, not bright and beautiful as they were through the spring and summer. Winter is upon us and, if the weather forecasters are to be believed, we are in for a colder and snowier winter than last year.

Although we see less of the sun in the winter months, the days themselves seem to last longer. Perhaps the cold and wind keep us more housebound, delaying errands until the sun shines. I am an avid reader and will always pick up a book rather than venture out into the cold. Throughout the long winter, God's presence is there as a beacon of light, waiting and listening to our prayers and concerns.

As we move through the Lenten season toward Easter, the flowers and trees will break forth into new growth with vibrant colors, and we will see the sun more each day. All are signs of God's presence in our lives, bringing us hope and anticipation of the days to come leading up to the glory of Easter Sunday.

May you always feel God's hand on your shoulder regardless of the temperature outside and know that, season-to-season, He is always there. This is my prayer for you.

Prayer: Lord, bring us flowers and sunshine all our days, as a sign of your everlasting presence in our lives. Grant peace to your world and let your love shine in our hearts, now and in the days to come. Amen.

Linda Flanary

Day 8

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024

Psalm 46:10

Be still, and know that I am God.

“Be still, and know that I am God” is one of my favorite Bible verses. Such a simple verse asking to do a simple task of being still. But, oh, how difficult it is to follow! When we are faced with a myriad of challenges in our lives, juggling several To-Do lists at home, work, church, and wherever else we have commitments, it is hard to be still.

A feeling of despair washes over me when things don't go as I had planned and my mind races to figure out why something happened or didn't happen. But the Good Lord calls out to us to “Be Still” and let go, knowing that He, our Loving God, is right there to give us peace and comfort. Knowing that we cannot always control our circumstances and outcomes, if we put our full trust in the Lord to guide us through life's many twists and turns, we can be at peace to accept whatever the outcome may be. So, I try my best to be still, knowing that God will show me the path forward in trying situations.

I don't think it is only in times of trouble that God calls us to be still. In the continued pursuit of success and happiness in our worldly lives and in moments of hearty celebrations, we need to take time to pause and reflect on what we might be missing to see or do as a true follower of Jesus Christ. Maybe we're just focusing on our own well-being and those of our near and dear ones and not paying attention to the rest of those around us who are in desperate need. Being still and knowing that He is God puts things in perspective for us, to not only appreciate all the blessings He has bestowed upon us, but also to open our eyes to see other's needs and our hearts to help them.

I believe that *being still*, and knowing that He is God, not only gives me peace and comfort, it also helps me be a little better version of myself every time I do it.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me be still and know that you, our God, are always there for us to provide peace and comfort in trying times. Help me to also remember that you are always working through our lives to make us a better version of ourselves. Grant us the wisdom to remember this not only when we feel burdened and overwhelmed, but also when our hearts are full, and we feel a sense of achievement. Amen.

Deepa Albert

Day 9

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2024

Clean in Christ

Leviticus 17:11 (NRSV)

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar, for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement.

Hebrews 9:22 (NRSV)

Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

A lot of people find the Bible's book of Leviticus cumbersome because it is law after law after law. A devout Jew in those times could be ceremonially "clean"—eligible to worship—only by obeying all the laws and offering the prescribed sacrifice for each and every offense. It was almost impossible to get "clean," let alone remain that way.

Living in the Church era as we do, we are almost 2,000 years removed from Christ's sacrificial death on our behalf. Scripture makes it clear that we who receive Christ's death on our behalf can no longer be judged for our sins (which we still commit daily). Having judged Christ for those offenses, God would be unrighteous to judge us, too. All that is left is to reward us for what good deeds we do. Revelation 19:8 declares that we will "wear" them in eternity. The writer calls them "fine linen" and we will not all be dressed the same. Some of us will be decked out in the most beautiful raiment, while others might be described as "bikini believers."

The world tends to see the coming Easter season in terms of cute baby animals and baskets filled with chocolate. Perhaps it's a reason to buy new clothes, too, and parade them about. But the Lenten season and the remembrance of what Jesus chose to do for us is serious business with eternal consequences. Do you realize that? Are you thankful for it? Does that motivate you to live each day in His service?

I was raised in a tradition where Lent was solemn. We ate only one full meal per day (that is to say, with meat) and none—ever—on Friday. Statues were covered in the sanctuary and bells common in worship were silenced from the preceding Thursday night until Easter Sunday. All this seems ascetic to us as 21st century Presbyterians. Regularly, but especially during Lent, I choose to celebrate the great freedom we enjoy in Christ—not publicly and not irreverently, but with joy.

Prayer: Lord, help us in this season of anticipation to receive with joy what you have given us in Christ, to live in the victory the resurrection gives us, and to anticipate the indescribable experience you hold for us in eternity with you. Amen.

Bob Timms

Day 10

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024

Isaiah 9:2 and 6

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. [...] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

For the past two Advents, Lucas and I have read the *Advent Storybook: 24 Stories to Share Before Christmas*, written by Antonie Schneider and beautifully illustrated by Maja Dusiková. Within the framework story of a little bear who opens a door on his Advent calendar every night, it tells the story of another bear who sees a special, bright shining star, and feels compelled to follow it to Bethlehem. On his journey, he meets a host of characters including a blind man, St. Nicholas, and a king, as well as animals like a little lamb and a wounded dog, who are also following that special star. The final door reveals a Child lying in a manger, joyfully opening his arms to the little bear and everyone he has met along the way.

In Lucas' favorite story in the book, the little bear comes upon a long "train of animals." He asks:

"Where are you all hurrying to?"

To the comfort-giver! answered the fox.

Behind the fox a lion appeared. The little bear trembled with fear.

Where are you going? he asked.

To the protector of the weak! [the lion] answered.

On the lion's head sat a pigeon. The little bear stared in amazement.

Is that what you call the Child who will be born in Bethlehem? he asked.

The animals nodded.

Then we have the same destination! cried the little bear, and he and the lamb joined the long train of animals headed for Bethlehem."

During Lent, we will hear many more names for this Child of Bethlehem: the Son of Man, the Man of Sorrows, the Lamb of God, the Suffering Servant, the Savior, the Redeemer, the Firstborn from the Dead, the Resurrection and the Life. Which of Jesus' names is most meaningful to you? How do you worship him?

Prayer: Jesus my Redeemer, I thank you for the many names you bear. Some days, I may need you more as a wonderful counselor, or as a suffering servant. I ask you to be close to me, oh comfort-giver. Firstborn from the Dead, Prince of Peace, I worship you. Amen.

Willemijn Don-Goetz

Day 11

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2024

Matthew 6:19

. . . where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

O sacred Head, now wounded,
with grief and shame weighed down,
now scornfully surrounded
with thorns, Thine only crown.
O sacred Head, what glory,
what bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call Thee mine.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered
was all for sinners' gain;
mine, mine was the transgression,
but Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
'Tis I deserve Thy place;
look on me with Thy favor,
vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

What language shall I borrow
to thank Thee, dearest Friend,
for this, Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever!
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
outlive my love for Thee.

The text that has come to us as *O Sacred Head Now Wounded* was for many centuries attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), but the scholarly community now thinks the probable author was the Cistercian abbot, Arnulf of Leuven (ca. 1200-1250). In the 17th century, Paul Gerhardt wrote an adaptation in German, and the English translation is the hymn we sing today.

The author questions what language is possible to express thanks for the saving death of Christ. The answer is simple: the only language for such “pity without end” is for us to give ourselves to God “forever” in the hope of never living a day without love for our Savior. The hymn reminds us that God is our greatest treasure and so it is with Him, above all other loves, that our heart finds its goal and peace.

Prayer: Loving Lord, assure me in this moment—and every moment after—that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ I belong to you. Let me experience more and more deeply that You are my greatest treasure and let my heart be set on You. This is my heart’s truest prayer: God of amazing grace, make me yours forever! Amen.

Greg Faulkner

Day 12

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT, FEBRUARY 25, 2024

Mark 8:31-38

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Day 13

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2024

Musings on Freedom

Romans 6: 16, 18

Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey, either of sin which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness. And having been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness.

There were 26 of us, a potpourri of nationalities: one from England, one from France, three from India, one from Russia, at least ten from Spanish-speaking countries, three from the Philippines, and the rest from other countries. We were gathered inside a huge hall in the Immigration and Naturalization building in Mt. Laurel, N.J. We were there to take a pledge of allegiance to the United States of America and become U.S. citizens.

We were unusually quiet and, I thought, artificially well behaved. People from the same country were talking in hushed whispers in their own languages although everyone answered in English when they talked to the immigration personnel. Everyone appeared well-dressed, certainly not typical of what Emma Lazarus depicted when she said: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free." In the background someone was playing Neil Diamond's *Coming to America* interspersed with Lee Greenwood's *God Bless the USA*. I was smiling thinking that this was a subliminal coercion to be good Americans. I cannot fully surmise the reason why these multinational immigrants came but I do know that most came looking for freedom: freedom to pursue economic security, freedom from actual persecution, religious freedom, intellectual freedom, freedom from want, and freedom to pursue happiness.

I remembered this experience while I was reading some verses from Romans 6. So, what is freedom? The *American Heritage* dictionary defines freedom as the capacity to exercise choice or free will. It is independence. It is the exemption from any form of control. Of course, freedom means a lot of different things to a lot of people. Socrates limited freedom to freedom from want. Aristotle widened the concept. "Freedom", he says, "is living as one wishes, but to act always as one desires is not freedom but slavery to desire." It was John Locke who described freedom as inalienable. "Life, liberty and property existed in nature and could never be taken away." And freedom, no matter how we define it, is always paired with responsibility. Yes, freedom is the ability to swing your arm anyway you want as long as you do not hit somebody's nose. Because freedom is paired with responsibility (or the law), complete, total, no-holds-barred or unadulterated freedom is an illusion. Even in the garden of Eden, there was a limitation, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

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Paul, in Romans 6, began with the idea that everyone is a slave to something. We are slaves to our ambition, money, time, or anything our mortal flesh can conjure. If we must be a slave to something or someone, we might as well be a slave to something worth being a slave to. Hence, to be truly free is to be a slave of Christ or, as the Bible puts it, to be a slave of Righteousness. But it is not easy to be a slave of righteousness. St. Augustine understood this when he said that following the Fall, man's tendency is to run away from God.

My experience in the Immigration Office occurred many years ago, but it is playing out every day throughout this country. I hope the 26 other people who were with me on that day are as thankful as I am to this country for giving us not only freedom from but also freedom to. More than that, I hope the 26 other people have found the greater meaning of freedom as God meant it to be.

Eby L. Banas, M.D.

Day 14

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2024

Ephesians 2:19-20

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners or strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

My family has always been extremely important to me. As the youngest of four children, I looked up in awe at my siblings and held my parents in high reverence (no pun intended). We were a preacher's family and talk around the kitchen table often focused on the church and its members. We became familiar with the people of the church and they became people we cared about. They became our Church Family.

This relationship grew and evolved over the span of almost 40 years and while I valued my time there, it was time to move on. When I arrived with my Dad, son, and nieces at Trinity, it was a bit overwhelming, having left a smallish church and coming to a much larger congregation. However, it did not take long before I started to get calls and offers to join different groups within the church. First, it was Courtesy Council, then Deacons and PW. Each organization in the church afforded me new opportunities to build relationships among the church members. Soon enough, I had a new Church Family!

If you are looking for a deeper connection to the church, I encourage you to explore the many groups and organizations within Trinity. Challenge yourself to take on a new adventure in your faith and build relationships with other members. You'll find there is room for everyone in this Church Family.

Prayer: Lord, bless our Church Family and help us to live and serve in a way that glorifies your most holy name. Amen.

Alison Schwarz

Day 15

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024

Psalm 121

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

We were never shore people; family vacations were in the Poconos, at my grandparents' summer house perched on a ridge overlooking a steep hillside and the hills beyond. Forty years spent in the hills of northwestern New Jersey furthered my love of rocks and hills, of roads that led to unexpected vistas of the ever-changing, never-changing mountains fading into the distance in shades of blue and purple. A simple drive to the supermarket brought those hills front and center. No wonder that the opening verses of Psalm 121, and always the King James version, came easily to my heart and mind. We moved south. No more mountains.

A few years after our move we found ourselves in the midst of a family crisis no one saw coming. Resolution meant near weekly drives to southwestern Pennsylvania, staying a few days to solve problems, confront new ones, make a little progress, and drive back home again. We were angry, troubled, emotionally wrung out and physically worn. When I thought to pray, my prayers were short and abrupt: Lord please help us - Lord give us strength - Lord give us patience. The long drives on the PA turnpike were accompanied by phone calls from legal staff, insurance companies, funeral directors, family members we hadn't spoken with in 20 years.

And yet...those trips, which should have been interminably boring, were a balm. The first drive was a horror of traffic jams and roadwork before we even reached the turnpike. But rising in the distance across the plateau the Appalachian Mountains appeared. It was mid-October, and the autumn colors were beautiful. We climbed higher, moved into the Alleghenies, and always there was new beauty before us. The words of Psalm 121 came back to me, unbidden.

I'd like to say that I grasped immediately the gifts of grace with which God surrounded me. Instead it took several weeks before I recognized them. The healing grace of beauty in each trip, through the changing colors of autumn, to the bare trees that opened new views, to a Hallmark snowfall on our last trip. The grace of compassion and friendship that we found in everyone that we dealt with over the weeks—something we never expected to find in the

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bureaucracy of death. The grace of welcome home from family connections that had fallen by the wayside. The grace of a quiet hotel room poised just above a river. The grace of meals taken with family, finding that the years apart made no difference. The grace of a priest and a gravedigger who made what could have been mundane into a sacrament.

I needed to see the hills to remind me to look up when everything in me wants to look down, to look out instead of in, to keep my heart open to receive the grace that God has for me in my need, in abundance.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Lord, with gratitude I know the abundance of your love and care for me is beyond imagining. Your Son promised us that we would not be left comfortless, so may I never forget that your help will ever be there for me if only I will look up with an open heart. Amen.

Judy Spotto

Day 16

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024

Returning to God

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all you heart.

Bill did not have much interest in religion. He was always too busy or could not see what good believing in God or Jesus could do. He intended to live his life just as he always had, without God.

Bill's attitude is not atypical. But I still sent him a card every Christmas hoping he would rethink his position. Last year's card arrived at a time when Bill was in the hospital undergoing treatment for colon cancer. In it, the card read "May God give you comfort all year." This got Bill to thinking: Maybe I am not alone in this. Maybe God knows what I am going through. Maybe I should return to God with all my heart.

This gave Bill much comfort and encouraged him to return to God and live his life in peace.

Did you ever turn away from God only to return? What made you decide to return?

Prayer: Dear God, give me comfort in times of trial that I may return to you, my only comfort and hope. Amen.

Corey Dart

Day 17

FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024

Matthew 6:27

And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?

When I sat down to consider a topic on which to base my Lenten Devotion, I was working at my desk. My desktop, underneath its protective glass, is filled with photos of my children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren.

Considering my desk is next to my television set, I can't help but look at those faces and think of the news the TV sends forth each day. What kind of world are we leaving for the next generation?

The world is still turning in its orbit – don't worry about it!

But does that mean nothing will ever change?

I've also heard that I'm a "perennial optimist!" So – I'm going with the optimistic view! God created the world umpteen years ago and the Bible tells us He saw it was good!

We may have our own vision of what is good or bad, but let's all accept God's view—Jesus took our sins and suffered on the cross for us. There must be some good around. It's up to us to accept it and act on it.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, let us accept our "Good Earth" and so live as examples to others. With your guidance and strength. Amen.

Opal Stockwell

Day 18

SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2024

Psalm 9:1

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.

When I survey the wond'rous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory dy'd,
My richest Gain I count but Loss,
And pour Contempt on all my Pride.

See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet,
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such Love and Sorrow meet,
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown?

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the Death of Christ my God:
All the vain Things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his Blood.

Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,
That were a Present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my Soul, my Life, my All.

Isaac Watts (1674 -1748), an English Congregational minister, was one of the few hymn writers who helped bring about a transformation in Protestant hymns by breaking with the custom of basically paraphrasing Biblical text for all hymns; instead, Watts wrote new poetry. Of his over 700 hymns including *Joy to the World* and *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*. *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* has become one of the great hymns by which the saving death of Jesus Christ, “the Prince of Glory” is celebrated.

The language of survey has two primary meanings. It can mean to carefully look at something, to thoroughly observe someone or something. To survey can also mean to take the dimensions of something, as in surveying a plot of land. Dr. Watts invites us to consider the amazing expanse of what Christ has accomplished upon the Cross. We are to look up, down, and from side to side, considering the cost of our salvation. When the immensity of God’s love for us is surveyed, we realize that even if we could offer all creation as a gift, it would be “a present far too small.” The only suitable gift is for us to give ourselves—to give thanks with our whole heart!

Prayer: Holy One, when I consider the abundance of the love you have for me—and not just me but for every person in the world—it is difficult to even begin to comprehend it. Such love makes me want to love you more dearly and to follow Christ more nearly. Thank you for the Cross of Christ by which he has taken my sins so I might become your beloved child. Thank you for love so amazing that it demands “my Soul, my Life, my All.” All this I give to You in gratitude and joy; through Christ our Crucified and Risen Lord. Amen.

Greg Faulkner

Day 19

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 3, 2024

John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Day 20

MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2024

1 Kings 3:5-10

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

“Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.

Every night, I pray for wisdom. I've been granted so many gifts and opportunities in life that it would be impossible to manage them independently. Personal emotions, the fear of letting people down, self-interest, innocent ignorance, lack of foresight—they all conspire to buffet our judgment as the seas of our lives cast us about. So to make the most of my responsibilities for having been so blessed, I pray for the one who put the stars in their orbit to guide my hands as well as my mind and to pilot me to calm waters.

Prayer: Dearest Lord, provide me with the judgment to govern the wonderful gifts which You've provided, too numerous to count or number. Help me to see how best to use them to help Your Kingdom come. In the name of our guiding star, Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Kurt Goetz

Day 21

TUESDAY, MARCH 5, 2024

Mark 9:24

I do believe. Help me to overcome my unbelief.

I struggle a lot with my faith. Of course, God sees and knows about my doubt. There's a saying: "Fake it until you make it." I sometimes feel like I'm acting the part of a Christian—worshipping with likeminded people, pledging to support my church, participating in mission projects and Bible study. But is it enough?

This year our Circle's study is *The Twelve Disciples Bible Study*. The study started with the big names—Peter, John, and James. By Lesson 4 the headliners were less well-known apostles—Matthew (the tax collector) and St. Thomas. You know ...“Doubting Thomas.”

Thomas was the disciple who had missed Jesus's first apparition. When his fellow apostles recounted the event, Thomas responded: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” A week later, Thomas and the others are in a locked room when Jesus visits for a second time. Thomas immediately believes and exclaims, “My Lord and my God!” And Jesus replies, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:24-29)

I often feel like Thomas. Flawed. Doubting. Questioning. Thomas was a skeptic. He wanted to believe, but thought he needed hands-on proof. That moment of skepticism has labeled him “doubter” for over two thousand years. But Thomas was a good and faithful follower of Christ. He was one of the original twelve, he traveled widely, and helped spread Christianity as far as India. This moment of weakness was just that—a moment.

When I doubt and worry about my doubt, I am comforted in what I learned about Thomas and Jesus. God has a plan for me whether I believe it or not. I just need to believe.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to overcome my doubts. My faith is in you. Amen.

Jenny Stark

Day 22

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2024

Psalm 23

*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,
He makes me to lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside the still waters,
He restores my soul,
He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
For thou art with me.
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies,
Thou anoints my head with oil,
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner provided an explanation of the 23rd Psalm after the 9/11 attacks when everyone was looking to be assured that we would—that America would—be all right.

After studying this psalm for over 40 years, Rabbi Kushner said that it has the power to “comfort” those who are grieving and “calm” those who are fearful.

God did not promise us that we would be free from pain and always be safe, but He did say that He would be with us in all that we experience in our lives, Kushner said.

As a shepherd leads his flock of sheep, God leads us when we hear His voice and obey Him. He provides us with beautiful “green pastures” where we can rest. He also gives us a “Sabbath” day when we can replenish our being and acknowledge that He is our God Almighty who provides for all our needs.

He leads us in many different paths which will take us in the “right direction,” so as to see His hand in all the good that happens in the world.

The shepherds used their staffs to help the sheep that were lost or tired; Jesus’ words are

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the “staffs” to follow. This is where we find true comfort. When friends and family fail us, when our enemies make us fearful, when we face disappointments, be faithful that God will provide His love for us.

Each of us is here on earth for a specific or special reason with a responsibility given by God. We are to find it by doing our very best, staying in focus as we are anointed by God. We live under God’s watchful eye; He provides reassurance, comfort, and guidance. Appreciate and be thankful for all that we have and do not look at the things we do not have. God has already given us everything that we will ever need in life. Feel good and grateful to be a “child of God.”

Prayer: Thank you, Almighty God, for coming as one of us as our Savior Jesus, the Christ!
Amen.

Marguerite Houck

Day 23

THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2024

Romans 2:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

The word “worship” appears more than 182 times in the Bible. It appears for the first time in Genesis 22:5. My star word this year is worshipful. I attend church and sing in the choir, so I am actively worshipping (the verb). But am I worshipful? The prayers I recite, the hymns I sing—is it just rote or do I actively show reverence each time?

I confess, there are days when I feel I am going through the motions. But then it's the phrase in a sermon, the lyric in a hymn, the prayer that comes at that moment when you least expect it but need it the most, that renews my energy to stand wholehearted with my brothers and sisters in Christ to truly worship the Lord with gladness, just as it says in Psalm 100.

Prayer: Lord, I pray that I always have a worshipful heart, that I give grateful praise for all your gifts. Amen.

Jen Dukelow

Day 24

FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2024

Luke 1:38

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Matthew 6:10

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

I have always been a "fixer of things." My Dad fixed things and I learned so much from him that it just seemed to come naturally. As a boy, if I broke something, I would try to fix it before my Mother or Dad found out it was broken. I wasn't always successful, but I covered more than my share of mistakes. As I grew older, I continued to be a "fixer." I became an industrial arts teacher and continued to make things and fix things for others as well as myself. I took pride in being able to do that.

What took me longer to learn and understand was that in the grand scheme of things, what I could fix didn't really matter as much as I thought. I found that those things which really mattered and needed to be fixed were "above my pay grade," and I must listen carefully to those words of Jesus and Mary.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, help me to always remember that You will guide me in the right path. Amen.

Bob Thorpe

Day 25

SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 2024

Matthew 16:24-26

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

Jesus walked this lonesome valley;
He had to walk it by himself.
Oh, nobody else could walk it for him;
He had to walk it by himself.

You must go and stand your trial;
You have to stand it by yourself.
Oh, nobody else can stand it for you;
You have to stand it by yourself.

We must walk this lonesome valley;
We have to walk it by ourselves.
Oh, nobody else can walk it for us;
We have to walk it by ourselves.

Most scholars of music agree that the history of this song is hidden in the mists of the past. Often listed as a Negro Spiritual, ethnomusicologists have argued that the song has its roots in the “wandering” or “lonesome” songs of the Appalachian folksongs. It might be more accurate to say that the song has been one of those that has been transmitted across multiple boundaries, both geographic and racial. The “lonesome valley” theme appears in several places within both the white and black communities of the mid-Atlantic and southern United States.

The power of this spiritual is that the sorrowful journey of Jesus becomes the model for our lives. As He walked through the pains and sufferings of this human life, we find assurance that He still walks with us. While no one else can walk the path for us, there is the clear connotation that we walk it alone with another Companion. Having fellowship with Jesus, the One who knows what it is to walk in the valley of the shadow of death, we are not afraid, for He is with us. Jesus holds us close and keeps our hearts within His loving embrace. The lonesome road is made walkable because He has gone before us, sanctifying our journey by His saving death and life-giving resurrection.

Prayer: Lord Jesus! Thank you for walking with me. I know my path is mine alone to walk. Help me to not be afraid but to trust that you go before me and with me, all along the way. Be quick to hear me, for I ask it for your great love’s sake. Amen.

Greg Faulkner

Day 26

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 10, 2024

John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Day 27

MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2024

God Is Waiting

Luke 15:32

But we had to celebrate and be glad, because a brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

I was angry with God! In less than 14 months, both of my parents and my wife of 33 years died. Why was God letting all this happen to me? It was not fair! As the Christmas holidays approached, I decided that I could not be at home; there were just too many memories to deal with at Christmas without these loved ones being present. So I booked a two-week trip to California to visit Disneyland and Universal Studios. That would surely be far enough to help me deal with my sadness.

While at Disneyland on Christmas Eve, I was reminiscing about the time when my wife and I were shopping in a souvenir store and my son got impatient and pleaded for us to leave. I told him that I was not ready to leave and that he should keep himself busy in another part of the store. When I was finally ready to leave, I could not find him. After searching the store and then going back to the hotel room, I still could not find him. I decided to go back to the store; I found him sitting on a bench outside the store. When he saw the exasperated look on my face he said, "Mom always told me if we got separated to stay at the last place where we were together, and she would find me."

That simple statement helped me to make a drastic change in my thinking. While I was sad over my recent losses, I also had almost lost my most treasured relationship – with God. I went to church that evening and reconnected with God. He was right where I left Him and was waiting for me with open arms.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please be with us even when we allow ourselves to be separated from You. Be patient with us. Allow us to discover that You have never left us and that You are waiting for us to return. Amen.

David Large

Day 28

TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024

Putting on a Show

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them.

Hank was a sociable guy and a local politician through and through. He was always shaking hands and promoting himself, non-stop. He even started to attend church on a regular basis so he could, as he put it, “work the room.”

Then the unthinkable happened. He lost the next election. Now his glad-handing came to a screeching halt. He even felt a bit depressed. And yet, something strange took hold of him. He felt the need to go to church. At first, he was putting on a show of piety; but now he has found comfort.

Hank realized church was not about garnering votes but something that cannot be seen: connecting with God.

Have you ever put on a show of piety? If you have, did it give you a deeper connection with God?

Prayer: Dear God, forgive me if I say prayers to you merely for show. Help me make a deeper connection. Amen.

Corey Dart

Day 29

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024

Psalm 46:10

Be still and know that I am God.

Put the phone on mute. Walk away from the computer. Turn off the TV. Sometimes I have to disconnect to make a connection.

All this noise distracts me from God's true purpose for me. A quiet prayer, a moment of peace, or a simple poem can get me back on track.

Here is a poem that I have read and reread. It calms me and refocuses me on the Spirit. It might do the same for you.

For all the great thoughts I have read
For all the deep books I have studied
None has brought me nearer to Spirit
Than a walk beneath shimmering leaves.

Golden red with the fire of autumn
When the air is crisp
And the sun a pale eye, watching.

I am a scholar of the senses
A theologian of the tangible.

Spirit touches me and I touch Spirit
Each time I lift a leaf from my path
A thin flake of fire golden red
Still warm from the breath that made it.

Steven Charleston, "Scholar of the Senses," *Spirit Wheel: Meditations from an Indigenous Elder* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2023), 22.

Prayer: Lord God, help me to slow down so I can see You in all people, all things, all the time. Amen.

Jenny Stark

Day 30

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 2024

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Recently, on a rainy Friday evening, I was driving my six-year-old to a birthday party waaaay down 295. I missed the exit and, knowing we'd now be arriving a little late, I said something like, "This is crazy. Who schedules a birthday party so far away on a Friday night?" And just like that, I'd transferred my anxiety and annoyance to Allie.

I've long known that anxiety impacts my own physical health. And, as a middle school teacher, I learned early on that my students can read my unguarded moods. As my own girls grow older, it's increasingly clear that those little sponges soak up all my emotions and react accordingly.

With God's help, I'm trying to be more mindful of that and to reframe those annoying and inconvenient situations—like a missed exit—as opportunities...to turn up the music and sing with my girls, to spend a little more one-on-one time in conversation with a loved one, to say a prayer of gratitude, or just to center myself and breathe.

Prayer: Good and gracious God, help me remember that my emotions impact the emotions of others—most importantly, my children. Help me to be present in everyday moments and to find peace amidst the chaos. Amen.

Liz Nieradka

Day 31

FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2024

Musings on Expectation

Romans 8: 25

But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.

Luke 12: 48

When someone has been given much, much will be required in return.

My daughter was quite nervous. Her graduating class asked some parents to help students in their choice of future professions. We were to speak about what to expect if one wants to be a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, etc. I was tapped to speak as a medical doctor. My daughter was afraid—no, she was sure—that I would embarrass her with my accent and propensity to mispronounce words.

“What do you want me to say or do?” I finally asked. “Dad,” she said, “these are smart people (her entire Cum Laude Club was attending), so whatever you do, don't be smart or act smart. Just be your usual self.” I was about to unleash a wicked repartee, but I didn't want her to be more nervous, so I held my tongue.

So, what are expectations? The *American Heritage* dictionary defines expectation as the act of looking forward to the probable occurrence or appearance of something. Its most common synonym is anticipation. It is closely related to hope, but it is not the same. With hope, we accept either outcome with equal probability; with expectation, we desire for a certain outcome and acceptance of anything else is hard. Expectation has a mundane aura about it, hope is more divine. To put it bluntly, expectation is beer, hope is champagne; expectation is horse race, hope is polo. A lot of our troubles, from broken treaties to broken marriages, stem from unmet expectations.

Expectation, like hope, is something that is yet to come. It is not yet real but in the process of becoming—or not becoming. In a sense, expectation is an illusion. Aristotle used the word *potentiality* to describe events that are not yet at hand and *actuality* to those that are. I suppose we can use the same contrast between expectation and reality: expectation applies to events that are not yet real and reality to those that are.

And yet, does not expectation give us a sense that something positive is about to happen? This is the theme of Charles Dickens' novel, *Great Expectations*. Alas, it is too long to

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summarize here. We have to have expectations to get there, don't we? The words from a song in the *South Pacific* musical remind us: *Happy talk keep talking happy talk, talk about things you like to do. You got to have a dream (expectation); if you don't have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true.*

We have to expect something to attain it. In a reality shrouded with a nebula of possibilities, expectation is the springboard from which we launch ourselves.

The Bible has a lot to say about expectation:

- Have an expectation but do not pin your hope on it. In Luke 6:36 Jesus said, "Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be paid." If you do something good, do it not because you expect something in return.
- If you expect something from God, accept what He gives you. Jacob said: "Naked came I from my mother's womb and naked shall I return. The Lord giveth and then Lord taketh."
- The only expectation worth having is what we expect from God. "For they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagle; they shall walk and not be weary; they shall run and not faint."
- Job's three friends used the law of cause and effect to explain Job's woes. Job used hope. "Though He slays me, I will hope in Him."
- God quite often gives us more than what we expect. In Acts 3, a beggar who was lame from birth asked Peter for money. Peter gave him more by curing his disability.

Prayer: Our Father, teach us to expect less reward from what we did but hope more from what you will do. Remind us that, as redeemed people, we are not only expected to do good but required to do good. For to him who has been given much, much is expected in return.

Eby L. Banas, M.D.

Day 32

SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 2024

Psalm 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (Were you there?)

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

O sometimes it causes me to tremble! tremble! tremble!

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nail'd him to the cross? (Were you there?)

Were you there when they nail'd him to the cross?

O sometimes it causes me to tremble! tremble! tremble!

Were you there when they nail'd him to the cross?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side? (Were you there?)

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

O sometimes it causes me to tremble! tremble! tremble!

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Were you there when the sun refused to shine? (Were you there?)

Were you there when the sun refused to shine?

O sometimes it causes me to tremble! tremble! tremble!

Were you there when the sun refused to shine?

The African-American spiritual *Were You There When They Crucified My Lord* was first printed in 1899, though it is believed that it more than likely was composed by enslaved African Americans in the 19th century. In 1940, it was included in the Episcopal Church hymnal, making it the first Negro Spiritual to be included in any major American hymnal.

The questioning spiritual asks of its hearers if we were present for the Lord's crucifixion. The immediate, and reasonable, answer is: "No, I wasn't there." The deeper answer is the spiritually accurate response of: "Yes, I was there. I saw it all. And it makes me tremble; tremble!"

The spiritual becomes a musical vehicle for us to contemplate the Lord's passion and death and to take more fully within our hearts the cost of our salvation. By faith, we were at the Crucifixion. The Apostle Peter, in I Peter 2:24, tells us that we were present as Jesus bore us and our sins on Calvary. By His taking on our sins, He put their power to death and healed our souls by His mercy. He created in us a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within us. Were you there? Yes! And because you were, you have been set free and made whole. Glory! Hallelujah!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came that I might know God. You lived that I might know that God is good. You died that I might be set free from sin, death, and hell. You rose again that I might live with you now and forevermore. Thank you, O Christ, for letting me be there at Calvary so I might live now in the power of your Resurrection. Amen.

Greg Faulkner

Day 33

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 17, 2024

John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Day 34

MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2024

Numbers 8:23-26

The LORD said to Moses, "This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the tent of meeting, but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the tent of meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites."

This text shows that God cares for his people by ending their role in the back-breaking labor and converting their role into that of guiding and assisting others.

The ages and labor associated with current-day work life are different from those of the Levites and different from person to person. Many people who retire find they have nothing meaningful to do with their time. My best friend retired from full-time work and has been just as busy and stressed in a related role as a consultant in the same field. She seems to thrive on the stress. As I see it, she has not really retired.

Another friend told me that she was afraid to retire because she has no life focus outside of work. She expressed that she was envious of my plan to be more active in my church. I pray that she will find activities that will be fulfilling in her retirement when it comes. I feel very lucky to be an active member of our Trinity Presbyterian Church family. Now that I have retired, I will have more time to serve the Lord in many ways. My current role as Chair of Mission & Outreach fits perfectly with my plan.

Prayer: Lord, I pray that you will be with me in this wonderful new beginning. Help me to seize opportunities that arise to explore the skills and gifts that you have given me, so that they may be used to glorify your name. Amen.

Stacey Blackmer

Day 35

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

Being True to God

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way.

My buddy Tom recently moved to a new community. He surprised me when he said he was thinking about going to church so he could make new friends and connections. Later, when I pressed him on how he was doing, he kept coming up with flimsy excuses as to why he had not been to church.

"I don't know when they have service." "I don't have anything nice to wear." Tom is putting obstacles in his way.

What? Does God care about what we wear? Paul said even though we may be "[mis]treated as imposters" (v. 8), God knows we have been made righteous by the blood of Christ. That is all we need to overcome obstacles when going to church.

Have you ever put an obstacle in your or someone else's way when it comes to attending church? How did you overcome them?

Prayer: Dear God, help me overcome flimsy excuses that stand in my way of worshipping you. Amen.

Corey Dart

Day 36

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

This is probably the most familiar and one of the most beloved verses in the entire Bible. It is beautiful and comforting.

I have used this verse as a “mantra,” repeating it five to ten times to let its words sink in. Often, I pray it in a new way. After all, God didn’t ONLY give us His only begotten Son. He gave us countless other beautiful and amazing things as part of creation:

- Butterflies
- The sun and the moon
- Birds that sing
- An apple tree that grows from a seed
- Wildflowers of all colors
- Friends with whom to share our joys and sorrows
- And the list goes on and on ... and on and on ... it’s infinite!

So sometimes I pray John 3:16 like this:

*For God so loved the world that he gave us _____ , **AND** he gave us his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Try praying this five times in a row, each time inserting something different that God gave us. Insert something special to you, or something beautiful, or something so darn off-the-wall that you would never normally think of thanking God for it (think: broccoli, swordfish, sand to make sandcastles...have some fun thinking of something unusual).

Prayer: Let us give thanks for all of God’s creation, **AND** that He gave us His Son and the promise of eternal life. Amen.

Gary Naumick

Day 37

THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024

1 Corinthians 13:2

If I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

We all say, "I have faith in you." In fact, you probably say it without thinking sometimes. Why do you have faith in someone? Is it because you want them to do something for you? Is it for them to do something for themselves? I have told my children I have faith in them. I have told my family and friends I have faith in them too. They have all said to me that they have faith in me! With all of this faith being passed around, shouldn't the world be a better place?

It can be if we back up our belief with love. Loving each other shows that we have faith in each other. And yes, sometimes you have to dig deep to have faith and love someone, but isn't that the real challenge? Isn't that the challenge that God showed us when He gave us his Son? He had faith in us and love for us, knowing that giving us his Son would make us better people.

So, think about it the next time you tell someone you have faith in them. Let them know you are backing it up with the love you have for them. And mean it! We can move mountains; we can have the faith in each other that makes God proud of us.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to show the faith and love that you have inspired in me. Thank you for showing us your faith and love by giving us your only Son. Amen.

Chris Slusser

Day 38

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

Isaiah 54:13

All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.

As a proud new grandmother in 2023, I cherished being a part of my grandson's baptism at Trinity. It was such a heartfelt moment for me.

My mother sang in the choir when I was a child, I was commissioned in the church, and I've watched both my children give their profession of faith. Becoming part of the Trinity family and, more importantly, God's family is a profound experience and having my grandson as a member of God's family fills my heart.

The sense of community, of family, is something I always feel in my soul. Watching the children grow up, from baptism to commissioning to marriage is what this congregation has manifested into being. We all are part of the support system, not only for each other, but especially for the children of the church. From teaching Sunday School, helping tie blankets during MLK Jr. Day projects, singing and ringing, supporting Youth car washes and breakfast fundraisers—there are so many ways to interact with our youth and let them know every week that they can count on the support system that Trinity has created and maintained for so many years.

Prayer: Lord, provide me with a strong faith to reach the hearts of children as they seek direction and purpose. Help me to show the youth of our church the pure love of you and your son. Amen.

Jen Dukelow

Day 39

SATURDAY, MARCH 23, 2024

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

What wondrous love is this,
O my soul! O my soul!

What wondrous love is this!
O my soul!

What wondrous love is this!
That caused the Lord of bliss!
To bear the heavy cross
For my soul, for my soul!
To bear the heavy cross
For my soul!

To God and to the Lamb,
I will sing, I will sing;

To God and to the Lamb,
I will sing.

To God and to the Lamb,
who is the great I AM,
while millions join the theme,
I will sing, I will sing!
while millions join the theme,
I will sing!

And while from death I'm free,
I'll sing on, I'll sing on,

And while from death I'm free,
I'll sing on.

and while from death I'm free,
I'll sing and joyful be,
and through eternity
I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
and through eternity
I'll sing on.

What Wondrous Love Is This is a folk hymn that originated in the southern United States during the Second Great Awakening (approximately 1790-1840). The lyrics were first published in Lynchburg, Virginia around 1811 in a camp meeting songbook. It soon began to appear in a broad selection of hymnals and has had diverse denominational use in America.

The hymn declares the amazing wonder that falls upon all who contemplate God's saving work in Jesus, underscoring that it is not an angry God that demands the death of the Son but a God whose love is nothing less than "wondrous." It also underscores the theological truth that the one work of the one God is what will be hymned by millions upon millions. To God and to his Son, the Lamb, the song that we join now on earth will resound "through eternity." As we sing *What Wondrous Love Is This*, we may think about how much God loves us and find that our hearts are set aflame again for love for our Redeemer Lord (Luke 24:32).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am so grateful for your wondrous love for me. I thank you for coming to the world in your Only-begotten Son and bearing the heavy cross of my sins. I thank you and the Lamb for your saving work in my life; in the power of the Holy Spirit, I now offer to you—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—my praise and worship and honor, now and forever and ever. Amen!

Greg Faulkner

Day 40

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2024

Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Mark 15:1-39

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?"

They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Day 41

MONDAY, MARCH 25, 2024

Luke 2:29-32

Simeon's words: *"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."*

Shepherds, Wise Men, Anna, and Simeon met the Infant Jesus and instantly knew that he was the Messiah they had been waiting for. They worshipped and adored him. As they departed from him, they told others. Their eyes had seen our salvation.

In thinking about the innkeeper with no room in the inn, would he have been drawn to the stable by the shepherd's arrival to see what was going on? Perhaps the Star shone ever so brightly into his window. If this innkeeper was from the line of David, living in Bethlehem, would he have known the Old Testament teachings of the Messiah? We can relate to the innkeeper. We read the Bible, and yet, sometimes we do not have room in our hearts to welcome Jesus. We might miss the light.

On the cross, while slowly dying for us, Christ said, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) These words from Jesus would apply to the Bethlehem innkeeper. These words apply to us. We are a forgiven people!

Prayer: Dear God, We know you are at work in our world. We have Scriptures to guide us and to invigorate us. Please help us open our eyes and then tell the others. Amen.

Beth Gammie

Day 42

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2024

Musings on the Strange Life of a Megakaryocyte

Isaiah 53: 5

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.

Most of you have, I'm sure, never heard of a megakaryocyte or know what it does. To put it simply, megakaryocytes are the parent cells of platelets. Platelets are the components of our blood responsible for clotting; without them we would all bleed uncontrollably.

Four months ago, my wife, Julie, got sick. Twelve little shiny stones blocked her bile duct causing a severe bacterial infection which spread all over her body. The infection caused septic shock that compromised her kidney and liver functions. Her bone marrow functions failed, so her platelets dropped from a normal of 200,000 to 38,000. With a low platelet count, Julie was oozing blood everywhere even from the pinprick to determine her blood sugar. A platelet transfusion was done to raise her platelet count.

But this is not a story about Julie's medical problems. This is a story about this little fellow called a megakaryocyte. Megakaryocytes are, as I mentioned above, the cells that produce platelets. How megakaryocytes produce platelets has puzzled hematologists. Megakaryocytes are formed in the bone marrow. Right after formation, they absorb so much material and they grow so huge (hence the term mega) that they literally burst into a thousand fragments. Each dying fragment becomes a platelet. Why megakaryocytes burst is the subject of much research. It is as if the megakaryocyte "sacrifices" itself to produce the platelets. A platelet is unique because it is the only cell in the body that has no nucleus or genes. Each bursting megakaryocyte scatters 10,000 fragments and each one becomes a platelet. The dying megakaryocyte retains its nucleus, and it is taken back to the bone marrow to begin the process of forming, enlarging and bursting all over again. The megakaryocyte, by whatever genetic command, gives its "life" to save a life by preventing it from bleeding.

So, there I was in Julie's hospital room, thinking about the strange life of a megakaryocyte when I remembered another strange fellow who gave His life that all may live. Isaiah described Him as one who grew up like a tender plant, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, and one on whom the Lord laid the iniquities of us all and on whom many will be accounted righteous. We were in a sorry state. "Long lay the world," as the old *O Holy Night* carol described it, "in sin

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and error pining, 'Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth." We were oozing lifeblood, and we needed a megakaryocyte. He sacrificed himself to atone us all. What is unique about Christ's sacrifice is that it is a "once-for-all-time" sacrifice that needs no repeating.

If you have heard of this person that Isaiah spoke of, then acknowledge Him; If you know Him, then worship Him; If you believe in His atoning act, then take Him into your life, accept Him into your being, and love Him.

Prayer: O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (*Collect Prayer for Holy Tuesday, The Book of Common Prayer*)

Eby L. Banas, M.D.

Day 43

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024

Ezekiel 36:36

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain,
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty —
Jesus Christ.

Angels and Archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air;
But only His Mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

**What can I give Him,
Poor as I am? —
If I were a Shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part, —
Yet what I can I give Him, —
Give my heart.**

The English poet Christina Rossetti wrote the poem, *A Christmas Carol*, to evoke the mystery of God becoming a human being. Published in the January 1872 issue of *Scribner's Monthly*, the poem would then be set to a tune by Gustav Holst in 1906. From that time till now, the hymn we know as *In the Bleak Midwinter* has become one of the most cherished Christmas carols in the English-speaking world.

During these Lenten days, you have been invited to consider your heart, the physical one, as well as that unseen heart—both are the place where life and love are experienced. Rossetti speaks of the heart as that gift which God will welcome most. As we contemplate Holy Week's sobering reality and Easter's hope-inspiring joy, how might you give your heart to Christ today?

Prayer: O God, I give you my heart. It is a bit scarred and a bit weary. Truth is, it might be more stone than I care to admit, so restore this heart of mine. Make it beat with love for you so I might experience the abundant life your Son is again offering me. This prayer I pray in His holy name. Amen.

Greg Faulkner

Day 44

MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

A Mumblin' Word

Luke 23:9

So he (Herod) questioned him at some length, but he made no answer.

One of the anthems that the choir usually sings on Maundy Thursday is *He Never Said a Mumblin Word*, an African American spiritual. This hymn depicts the suffering of Jesus: crucifixion, nailing to the cross, piercing His side, and finally dying. Jesus was never shy about speaking out, but during these brutal events, He never said a word.

If only we could be like Jesus when troubles come our way!

When others gossip about us, can we be silent and not respond?

When we have difficulties in our family life, can we not lash back at other family members?

When there are disagreements in the church, can we seek out compromise and not demand that "our way" is best?

When life seems to shake our beliefs, can we return to the sure foundation of trust in Jesus?

When we are suffering, we need to look to Jesus and remember that He suffered for us and never complained.

Prayer: Lord, help us to think about Your suffering and Your silence in the midst of so much pain. May we be Christ-like in our response to the difficulties that we encounter in our daily lives. Amen.

David Large

Day 45

GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 2024

Philippians 3:7-8

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ.

This fall, the pastor led a very enlightening study of the book of Philippians. These verses followed Paul's recounting of his hereditary standing as a Jew, his accomplishments, and his blamelessness under the law. He clearly had a high standing as a Jew, and yet he counted his status and accomplishments as a loss in comparison with knowing Christ.

These verses made me recall the similarity to the first two verses of "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" by Isaac Watts:

*When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.*

According to a Methodist Hymnal that I have, the hymn is based on Galatians 6:14:

But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

It seems that Paul had the same understanding and awe of Christ's sacrifice and expressed it in slightly different ways to the believers at Galatia and Philippi. It is also marvelous how these ideas were interpreted and set to music by Dr. Watts to bring them to people since the 1700s. The two letters from Paul, and the hymn, all emphasize the wondrous sacrifice of the Lord and what it means to us. It is wonderful to ponder them and to try to comprehend the gift we have been given.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the sacrifice of Christ. Help us to understand how wonderful this gift is, to the point that all of our own accomplishments become a loss, or refuse, in the words of Paul. Thank you for your servants, Paul and Isaac, who paint this picture for us that we might believe and be saved. Amen.

Doug Gammie

Day 46

HOLY SATURDAY, MARCH 30, 2024

Isaiah 53:5-6

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Alas! and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sovereign die!
Would He devote that sacred head for sinners such as I?

Was it for sins that I have done He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown! And love beyond degree!

Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut its glories in,
when Christ, the great Redeemer, died for human creature's sin.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe.
Here, Lord, I give myself away; 'tis all that I can do.

Dr. Isaac Watts calls for all believers to give attention to the devotion of Christ that caused him to give himself for us and our salvation. We owe our Lord a debt, says the hymnwriter; it is “the debt of love.”

How do we show people we love them? Of course, we tell them, but we also show them by, perhaps, giving them gifts or doing things for them that please them. We also show love by spending time with our beloveds. What are you doing for Christ? What gifts do you offer him in your life? How much time do you spend with our Savior? These are not questions to create guilt or shame. These are questions to help us evaluate our love for God. The good news is that God loves us more than we can imagine and so every “debt of love” we pay is, in reality, a gift to ourselves for it draws us more deeply into the joyous, transformative, liberating relationship with our “great Redeemer.”

Prayer: God our Creator, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they rest in you. By the wondrous and wonderful grace of your love, you have set us free. Help me to learn to give you “the debt of love” not out of obligation but out of gratitude for so great a salvation. This I ask of you in the Name of our Faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Greg Faulkner

Day 47

RESURRECTION SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 2024

Mark 16:1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.



*O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.*

From Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Robert Robinson

