

# Light

SHINES THROUGH

**2025 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL**  
**FORTY DAYS OF REFLECTION:**  
*VOICES OF FAITH, HOPE, & LOVE FROM ST. MATTHEW'S*



**SAINT MATTHEW'S**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

**THANKS TO THE 2025 LENTEN  
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Bible Study, Apps, Events, Recipes and more:

**[stmmts.org/Lent](http://stmmts.org/Lent)**

# LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

The Ash Wednesday liturgy in The Book of Common Prayer invites us “to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.”

This booklet of daily devotional reflections has been written by the members and friends of Saint Matthew’s and is offered to our church community as one of the ways we are observing Lent together. Each day’s Bible readings are taken from the lectionary of the Book of Common Prayer and are listed, followed by a devotional.

Each devotional provides a reflection that is based on one or more of the day’s scripture readings. Each author reflects on a personal connection (by way of a memory or short story) and concludes with a short life lesson learned and a prayer. The date and the scripture readings for the day are printed at the top of each page.

**An example of the devotional’s format is shown below:**

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## SUNDAY, MARCH 16

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**Psalm:** 27

**Old Testament:** Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

**New Testament:** Philippians 3:17-4:1

**Gospel:** Luke 13:31-35

We are grateful to all the contributors for being willing to share something of their own spiritual and personal lives with the rest of the community in this way.

May this Lent be a season of growth and insight among us, as the Holy Spirit reveals the Word of God in us through our daily prayers and meditations.

**Spiritual Formation Committee  
Saint Matthew’s Episcopal Church  
Lent 2025**

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## ASH WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5

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**Psalm:** 103

**Old Testament:** Joel 2:1-2,12-17

**New Testament:** 2 Corinthians 5:20B-6:10

**Gospel:** Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

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*As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation. We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry. —2 Corinthians 6:1-3*

"Thanks be to God!" was her favorite prayer (I'll call her "Helen"). She loved Jesus and the Book of Common Prayer, her children, cats, and chocolate! She was intelligent, tough, raised her children alone, and volunteered at church. But genetics had not been kind to Helen. Eventually, she was homebound. I would take communion to her on Sundays, shop for her groceries every week or two, and occasionally drive her to medical appointments.

One day, after having delivered groceries to Helen, I received a "thank you" letter from her. It started out very nicely, but it ended with a list of the things I got wrong. True, I had replaced items on her list with similar ones of a different brand (it was a time before cell phones), but going to another store to get the specific items she wanted would have required more of my time.

Two weeks later, as I pushed Helen's wheelchair out of an examination room, I stopped at the front desk so that she could make her next appointment. The aide innocently asked me, "When would you like to schedule her next appointment?" Sitting small, stooped in the wheelchair, with her head only slightly held up by a neck brace, Helen angrily shouted, "Look at me! Ask me!" (In my haste to leave, I had not immediately referred the aide to Helen for an answer.)

Thirty years later, I finally understand Helen's written message and her verbal outburst. She was hurting, mourning the loss of her independence, suffering the indignity of having her specific food choices so easily dismissed, lamenting the invisibility of her intelligence and importance in the eyes of others.

I wish I had served her better.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I use the Lenten days before me to reflect on Your Word, to learn how to truly listen, and to stop putting obstacles in my own way. May I never again accept the grace of God in vain. Amen.

-Martha Olson

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## THURSDAY, MARCH 6

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**Psalm:** 1

**Old Testament:** Deuteronomy 30:15–20

**Gospel:** Luke 9:18–25

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*Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster.* —Deuteronomy 30:15, NLT

I am surprised by how much my faith journey involves reminding myself to open my heart to hear what God has to say. I'm not talking about occasional reminders at church. I'm talking about every moment of my day. Why is it so easy to forget and turn away? In today's passage from Deuteronomy, Moses is shouting about the life and death decision he is offering, starting off with a forceful "Now listen!" And he's not messing around with the truth bomb that he goes on to deliver:

*But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods, then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live a long, good life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy.* —Deuteronomy 30:17-18, NLT

In my own experience, the slippery slope of turning away, even for a moment, leads quickly to my worshiping other gods. Some of these false gods hovering around me, waiting to pounce, are the gods of appearance, comfort, achievement, and recognition. The gods of control and fear are two particularly ruthless false gods at play right now.

My eldest daughter is a high school senior this year, and I let my worries for her future and desire to control her college decision outcome override God's plan for her life. Every day I make a conscious effort to reject fear, turn to God, and listen for His guidance to let my daughter take the lead on her own life.

The good news is that now I recognize the constant power play for my mind as a distraction to the real call God makes for my heart. When my mind starts to race, and I inevitably forget (again!), I don't beat myself up for it—I am, after all, human. Instead, I let my heart soften and chuckle at my ridiculously short memory. I've come to understand that this constant recalibration is part of His plan and part of my growth as a Christian. God doesn't force me to listen or to choose Him, but He desperately wants me to.

Lord, thank you for the grace You offer when I turn away from You and then inevitably turn back, time and time again. Amen.

– Sara Warnick

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## FRIDAY, MARCH 7

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**Psalm:** 51:1-10

**Old Testament:** Isaiah: 58:1-9a

**Gospel:** Matthew 9:10-17

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*Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.* —Isaiah 58:9a

All my life, thanks to my parents, I've appreciated the liturgy and weekly worship. I've loved reading the lessons, serving at the altar, and singing with the choir. I've even loved participating in the baking and the polishing and other behind-the-scenes activities that go into preparing the altar. It's at church, with my church family, where I've found light and peace and where I feel God's presence. It's where I found His peace and presence this past Christmas. Everything went smoothly. All was right with the world.

Then darkness came.

I woke up on Wednesday, January 1, 2025, looking forward to my own fresh start, only to learn that, while crowds were celebrating the New Year in New Orleans, someone plowed their truck into the crowd killing several unsuspecting people and severely injuring many others.

We were still in the season of Christmas with our newborn Lord. Just three hours into the New Year. So shocking and horrific. They are still searching to discover what really happened and why. It happens far too often. An evil darkness caused by hatred.

People are hurting and angry. Anger won't help us stop these tragedies. Punishing and attacking those we think are responsible won't stop it from happening again.

I've been taught that loving others is the answer and to pray for all God's children. But that is so hard to do when I'm worried, and I don't understand what is going on and how it can be fixed.

So, I worry, and I pray.

Please, Lord, I can't make sense of the world, and I know I can't fix its problems. May Your light break through our darkness. And when I don't understand and when I feel helpless, I pray that You answer my cry for help and that I may hear You say, that we may all hear You say, "Here I am." Amen.

– Sue Reier

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## SATURDAY, MARCH 8

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**Psalm:** 86:1-11

**Old Testament:** Isaiah: 58:9b-14

**Gospel:** Luke 5:27-32

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*Hear me, LORD, and answer me...Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God, save your servant who trusts in you. —Psalm 86:1-2 NIV*

There have been many times in my life when I have called on the Lord for help. The Lord has always answered me, but there have been times when the answer wasn't the one I wanted.

Once I asked in prayer, "What would You have me do?" I was asking for direction in making my annual pledge to the church. The answer I heard was God calling me to pledge the money I was receiving from one of my part-time jobs. So, I did.

Well, within a month, I learned that the specific job was ending. "Now what should I do?" I asked out loud, just to make sure He heard me.

I mentioned it to some of my friends, who advised me just to tell the church that my financial situation had changed and that I could no longer donate that amount.

But, after praying on it some more, I felt that God wanted me to trust Him and to honor my pledge; and so, I did.

I honored my pledge, even though I expected that I would have difficulty keeping up with all my expenses—but I didn't notice anything at all! There was no crisis.

At year-end, when my taxes were prepared, my accountant made an interesting comment. She said, "I don't really understand how you did it, but somehow you did." I told her it wasn't me, that it was a God thing.

Many years ago, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and I have put my trust in Him ever since. I know He hears my prayers; and I know He answers.

Father God, "Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God, save your servant who trusts in you." Amen.

– Sandra W. Gentry



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## SUNDAY, MARCH 9

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**Psalm:** 91:1-2, 9-16 **Old Testament:** Deuteronomy 26:1-11

**New Testament:** Romans 10:8b-13

**Gospel:** Luke 4:1-13

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*He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, One does not live by bread alone." —Luke 4:2-4*

The passages surrounding the temptation of Jesus have always been emotional for me, and their meaning and my understanding change as I evolve through my life. In this passage, I'm in awe of the discipline Jesus shows in His interactions with the devil.

As an IT manager of a 20-person team, I believe the foundational elements of efficiency greatly depend on the self-discipline of the team members, and on their effective work ethic. Occasionally, I find myself getting bogged down in a sea of emails or in a day of constant meetings that prevent me from getting any meaningful work done. I see self-discipline as the foundational element of our lives that motivates us to do the things we should be doing (but that are not always pleasant) or to stay away from the things that make us less than God intended (from too much excess or just idle doomscrolling).

While I encourage my team members to be disciplined to keep them efficient, my primary purpose is only in building an expert team that could be successful in any workplace. Jesus' primary purpose was much more noble; it was love. But love can be very hard—it is patient and kind.

It's hard to be loving when I'm exhausted and hungry, and sometimes the people I most love bear the brunt of my humanity. My comfort in this passage is that Jesus had the discipline to become a perfect sacrifice for all, including those I love most!

Lord Jesus, I pray that, no matter my human physical limitations or attitude, I can be disciplined in my life for those whom I most love, and that I may have the strength to maintain a loving and tender attitude toward all. Amen.

– Richard A. Sather

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## MONDAY, MARCH 10

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**Psalm:** 19:7-14

**Old Testament:** Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

**Gospel:** Matthew 25:31-46

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*Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." —Matthew 25:35-40*

To our chagrin, the single-family house next to ours had been converted into a short-term rental. This meant we wouldn't have any long-term neighbors to grow with. There wouldn't be enough parking places for us and all the new tenants' cars. No one living in the house would have the motivation to take care of how the yard or the house looked.

We figured we'd just have to get used to living next to a merry-go-round of strangers. But I did attempt to get first names, to say hi, to smile, to simply acknowledge them in passing.

Not long ago, I met a tenant who had just arrived from Afghanistan with his wife, young son, and daughter. His English was very broken, but his effort to communicate was captivating. He told me stories of his hardships to get here via Turkey after the U.S. left Afghanistan.

A few days after meeting him, as I was leaving for work, I saw him and his wife trying to rake up the leaves in the yard using an iron hoe rake. I walked over and showed them how to use a leaf rake, how to bag the leaves, and where to put them for pick-up. I lent him our rake and gave him several bags, as the yard was covered with leaves.

When I came home from work, I noticed that the short-term rental yard was raked clean of all leaves and 8 bags packed full of leaves had been left at the curb. But to my embarrassment and astonishment, the couple had raked up all the leaves in our yard and left 6 packed bags of leaves at our curb.

I laughed and thanked them for doing my yard work. But the beauty of the situation was that a little bridge had been built between us; and the world was a little nicer.

I don't have a problem with the merry-go-round of neighbors next door. I simply have more opportunities to welcome a stranger.

Lord, please help me stay on Your path of harmony and love for all my neighbors so that I might build bridges over walls. Amen.

– Richard Henry

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## TUESDAY, MARCH 11

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**Psalm:** 34:15-22    **Old Testament:** Isaiah 55:6-11

**Gospel:** Matthew 6:7-15

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*Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. —Isaiah 55:6-7*

Mercy and pardon...

Standing on the shore of an island off the coast of Maine, I gazed in wonder at the vastness of the ocean. On hikes, I have stood on mountain tops and seen mountain after mountain unfolding in the distance. In Alaska, I've seen snowfields, as far as I can see and beyond. I'm not sure why it feels so good to feel so small, but seeing this immensity makes me thankful for the generosity of God—to provide these beautiful sights, these vast spaces for us to be restored in.

Today's reading in Isaiah 55 speaks to me of another kind of God's bottomless generosity—He forgives me and does so abundantly. Not just "letting me off the hook," I picture Him gladly handing out forgiveness with abandon! Like tossing candy from a parade float saying, "Here, there is more where that came from. My love for you can't be measured and my abundant pardon is proof."

Because I'm human, sometimes it's hard for me to forgive (like Jesus teaches in Matthew 6). But I can call in reinforcements. God, who delights in giving abundantly, will show me the way and give me the help I need.

Dear Lord, thank You for the immensity of Your creation, and the abundance of Your love and forgiveness to me. Please help me to be grateful and to share Your abundance with others in all that I do. Amen.

– Linda Merola

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## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12

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**Psalm:** 51:11-18

**Old Testament:** Jonah 3:1-10

**Gospel:** Luke 11:29-32

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*Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit...The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. —Psalm 51:11-18*

During the pandemic, I started praying every morning using the daily morning devotion for individuals and families from the Book of Common Prayer. I set up a little prayer corner, plopped myself down, and flipped open to page 137. And every morning, as a part of the prescribed liturgy, I would pray Psalm 51.

There's something about prayer in hard circumstances that feels unique—maybe more raw, more honest. I was praying every day to not be cast away from God's presence at a time when the real presence of God in the Eucharist was no longer available. This drew me close to God in a way that was exactly what I needed at a time when there were so few places to turn. I had lost my job and my physical faith community, and the end of my college career was fast approaching. Knowing that God was there, seeing and comforting my troubled spirit and delivering me daily from the death that seemed to be closing in, sustained and nourished me.

Now, each time I pray Psalm 51, I am reminded of both the struggle to survive the challenges of the pandemic and the grace that God showed me during that time. Praying these words, I am reminded of the comfort I felt at that time. And I know that God continues to sustain me in the same way that He did back then, in the same way that He always has, whenever I cry out in repentance and seek return.

God, as I go into this day, I pray that You hold me close, showing me Your love, and sustaining me with Your hope. Amen.

– Gabriel Oakes

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## THURSDAY, MARCH 13

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**Psalm:** 138    **Old Testament:** Esther (Apocrypha) 14:1-6, 12-14

**Gospel:** Matthew 7:7-12

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*I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing your praise. . . When I called, you answered me; you increased my strength within me. —Psalm 138:1,4*

In 2012, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer. He tried chemotherapy but quickly decided that the side effects were intolerable. His only wish was to die at home. I lived 1500 miles away.

The hospice nurse called. She spoke to me calmly, but with an urgency in her voice. “You have to come,” she said. “Your father needs help, and your mother can’t handle this.” Mom was a strong woman who liked to take charge of situations, but she could easily become nervous and agitated. Only later did I learn that she had entered the early stages of Alzheimer’s.

After I arrived, the hospice nurse came over. “He needs a hospital bed,” she said, “but your mother refuses to let us bring one in.” She explained the bed’s main features—adjustable, to reduce the risk of falling, and a mattress designed to enhance comfort and help prevent bed sores. For me, it was a no-brainer.

But no matter how logical and detailed my reasoning, Mom said, “No!”

Dad’s condition was rapidly declining. I was at my wit’s end, pleading with God to help Dad get the hospital bed he needed.

The next evening, a young man from their church came to visit Dad. Before leaving, he asked if there was anything he could do. I recognized this as the answer to my prayers. This young man lost his wife a few months earlier, and Mom had become very fond of them.

“Yes,” I said, “please persuade my mother to allow Dad to have a hospital bed.” Ten minutes later, he stepped out of Dad’s room with Mom, and she said yes. I was stunned!

The next morning, Dad had a hospital bed, which provided him with comfort until he passed peacefully two weeks later.

Thank you, God, for that visitor and for guiding Dad peacefully and comfortably home. Thank you for all answered prayers. Amen.

-Martha Olson

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## FRIDAY, MARCH 14

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**Psalm:** 130

**Old Testament:** Ezekiel 18:21-28

**Gospel:** Matthew 5:20-26

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*If you, Lord, were to note what is done amiss, O Lord, who could stand? For there is forgiveness with you; therefore, you shall be feared. I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope. —Psalm 130:2-4*

I love thinking of others and don't hesitate to step in when someone needs help. It doesn't matter if it's a person, an animal, or our planet Earth. Nevertheless, as a teacher, a mom, and a youth volunteer, I find that I have a special place in my heart for helping children.

I have observed that in the society of Northern Virginia, there are high expectations for children from both their families and from schools. From all the reading, conferences, and observations I've completed for my job, I've learned that soft skills are as important as academic ones. The patience, dedication, and love we offer our children create in them feelings of safety, competence, and love.

The most important gift I can offer our children is to help them build a steady foundation of values based on our Christian faith—a safe place for youngsters to return to, feel secure, recharge, and belong.

Today, while discussing how we are the body of Christ, the children in my Sunday School classroom told me that I was Jesus' leg. My hope is that, even to a small degree, I can live up to that "image," and as Jesus' leg, I will continue to reach out to those in need, serve others, and try to embody Jesus' love, compassion, and grace.

I hope to help people move forward by trying to model good Christian behavior. God's mercy helps me to step back, and at the same time, to be present and to act as Jesus would—by loving others.

Lord, I am here, ready to step in if a child, or anyone else, needs my help. My hope is in You. In Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

– Alex Yarbrough

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## SATURDAY, MARCH 15

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**Psalm:** 119:1-8

**Old Testament:** Deuteronomy 26:16-19

**Gospel:** Matthew 5:43-48

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*Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." —Matthew 5:43–45*

"Unconditional love? Sweet!" I said, when I read this passage. Finally, an easy assignment! But almost as quickly, I sighed and said, "Wait, not so fast, Sparky."

As I write this, it is a week before the presidential election. Can I honestly say that I love everyone who does not support my views? That is a tough question these days.

I recall my feelings toward an area manager I once worked for years ago. He was horrible. He was one of two people I've ever known that I would consider placing in the "Those I Hate" category. My fellow managers and I got together and decided that, while it would be hard to get him fired, we could probably help him get promoted. So, we did!

He was so happy about getting a promotion that he took all his managers on a day trip to celebrate. None of us wanted to go, but we did. During that trip, turns out we had fun, laughed, and enjoyed meals with him. He talked about his wife, his children, and what they did for fun as a family. We shared moments and got to know each other a little bit more than we ever had. At the end of that day, I still did not like him as a boss. But I did understand him more as a person, father, and husband.

Jesus calls me to love everyone. This is easy to say, but it can be very hard for me to do, especially all the time. I would like to think I am getting better at loving others the older I get. But I know I still have a ways to go.

Lord, grant me the wisdom and strength to embrace and love others unconditionally, regardless of their views. Help me see beyond differences and recognize the shared humanity within us all. Fill my heart with compassion and understanding, so I may treat each person with kindness and respect. Guide my actions and words, that they may reflect love and acceptance in every interaction. Amen.

– Dan Robertson

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## SUNDAY, MARCH 16

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**Psalm:** 27

**Old Testament:** Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

**New Testament:** Philippians 3:17-4:1

**Gospel:** Luke 13:31-35

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*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid? —Psalm 27:1*

A few years ago, my father asked me to take him to his routine cardiology checkup, and I agreed. We planned to grab lunch after the appointment (footlong chili cheese hot dogs at one of our favorite dive restaurants). We checked in, the nurse took him back, and I waited. I thought everything was normal until the nurse walked back with my father saying, "I'll be praying for you." My heart sank; these were not words indicating a clean bill of health. The checkup had revealed my father needed an emergency quadruple bypass. My dad was terrified—and so was I, but I wasn't about to let him know that. I needed to reassure him, while all the eldest child's responsibilities and worst-case scenarios were crashing around my head. His surgery was scheduled for early the next day.

I wish this verse would have been with me during Dad's surgery. The words would have brought me comfort, reminding me I have an infinite strength on which to rely in difficult situations.

"The Lord is the strength of my life; of [what] then shall I be afraid?" What a bold declaration and emphatic reminder that God is forever on my side. Armed with the reminder that God is my strength, the challenge of taking care of my father would have seemed much less daunting to me. The words would have invigorated my spirit and increased my wherewithal to handle my duties as the eldest child. "The Lord is my light"—and that light might have helped shine a path out of the worst-case scenarios I was imagining.

I didn't have this verse with me, but I prayed all the same, as any child would. The surgery was a success. My dad made a full recovery and is happy and healthy today. Will there be more health issues down the road? Probably. Will I be asked to help? Almost certainly. But I'll be ready to handle it with the strength and light of the Lord in my heart.

Lord, be with all those facing challenges this day. Let them feel Your heavenly light shine upon them and know they can lean into Your infinite strength. Amen.

–Justin Warnick



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## MONDAY, MARCH 17

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**Psalm:** 79:1-9

**Old Testament:** Daniel 9:3-10

**Gospel:** Luke 6:27-38

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*Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. . . A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap: for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."*

—Luke 6:27-38

"You don't get to pick your family" is something I know well. My dad remarried after my parents divorced. His new wife has never cared for Dad's blood family. We were excluded from holidays, birthdays, graduations, retirement, and other events his new family celebrated.

To visit Dad, I must invite myself, and sometimes I am refused. Because of this isolation, he never got to know my children, now adults and his only blood grandchildren. Although sad, I learned to live with it, reasoning that Dad was the one missing out.

I prayed that Dad's second family would teach him the value of loving others, and I believe that it has. He seems happy, and that is my solace. I always include Dad and his wife in my prayers, although I've stopped asking God to change their hearts; instead, asking for grace and patience for mine.

My in-laws always bristled at my dad's apparent lack of interest, particularly in his grandchildren. By way of contrast, my mother-in-law and my father-in-law, before he passed away, were insanely in love with their grandchildren and never missed an opportunity to spend time with them. She remains close to my children, even now that they are grown, moved away, and in relationships.

This is true of their love for me as well. I have truly been the daughter my in-laws never had, and I have been the blessed recipient of their love, support, encouragement, and generosity for 40 years. And the feeling is mutual. I love them with all my heart. My life has been incredibly enriched by their presence, and I am a better person because of it.

Thank you, Lord, for giving me the grace to love those who may not love me and for rewarding me with a measure of great love in return. Amen.

– PCC

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## TUESDAY, MARCH 18

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**Psalm:** 50:7-15, 22-24 **Old Testament:** Isaiah 1:2-4, 16-20

**Gospel:** Matthew 23:1-12

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*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “. . .do not do as [the scribes and the Pharisees] do, for they do not practice what they teach. They do all their deeds to be seen by others . . . All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

—Matthew 23:1-12

My childhood home is in Herndon, VA, only ten minutes away from Herndon High School. However, by a quirk of bureaucracy, it landed in the school district which mainly pulled from the wealthy Great Falls area, subjecting the neighborhood teenagers to a fifty-minute morning bus ride to Langley High School. My siblings and I saw many a Porsche and Jaguar in that school parking lot, and classmates' parties often included touring a mansion complete with a pool house and private tennis court.

Thankfully, my parents didn't let this proximity to visible shows of wealth warp our perspective—we knew we had every reason to be thankful, even though we didn't have a nanny, housekeeper, or cook.

It wasn't until I entered adulthood that I learned our family could have lived just like those Great Fallers—but my parents turned down the promotions that would have sent their income skyrocketing. Their reasoning was this: the promotions entailed considerable travel, which would have meant much less involvement in their children's day-to-day lives. Even without promotions, their income could have afforded us more conspicuous luxury—they simply chose to live well below their means and to give away a substantial amount to charity.

Consequently, I am left with wonderful memories of the time my parents spent with us, coaching our sports teams, helping at church, and sharing dinners around the kitchen table every night. I have no memories at all of them seeking status in any way. No flashy cars or jewelry, and no boasting about big donations...just quiet, humble work to lift the burdens of their children and community. Truly, they did, and still do, practice what they taught us about what is important in this life.

Lord, help me to remember Your teachings and, in remembering, to act upon them according to Your will. Amen.

- Caitlin Dronfield

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## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19

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**Psalm:** 89:1-29

**Old Testament:** 2 Samuel 7:4, 8-16

**New Testament:** Romans 4:13-18

**Gospel:** Luke 2:41-52

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The promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith...it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all...who share the faith of Abraham. —Romans 4:13-18

“The righteousness of faith”—something about this phrase gives me confidence in what I choose to do.

At work, I always suffered from the “imposter syndrome,” always doubting myself. It never impressed me that my director would ask me to train newcomers, or ask my colleagues, “Has Lisa approved this?” Or when one of my customers said to my boss, “I don’t care about your reorg, we want Lisa to be our account manager.”

In contrast, with my church family I have always felt confident, even in taking on new things. I believed, through what I call my righteousness of faith, that I was doing this for God, for our Lord Jesus Christ. If I was doing it for Him, it felt right, and even if I made many mistakes, I always tried to carry on.

I remember when I joined Richard Leach for our very first high school mission trip. It was his idea to take this on. When he asked me to be the female leader, I told him I’d have to think about it and that I’d get back to him the next day. I don’t think I even made it 30 seconds before saying, “Yes, I’ll do it.”

I had zero regrets. Even when we were asked to do a prayer walk—to stop people on the street, have a chat, then ask if we could pray for them. Eek! As someone who’s always been on the shy side and a definite introvert, I just thought, “OK, let’s do this!” And I enjoyed it much more than expected (and feared)! The whole trip was such an eye-opener; I had never felt so deeply rewarded! In fact, after that first seemingly impetuous decision, I went on 5 more mission trips with the high schoolers.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being in my life and for always reminding me that working in Your favor is rewarding and gratifying. Thank you for bringing me to St. Matthew’s, where I can always find an opportunity to exercise my righteousness of faith. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

– Lisa Lintelman

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## THURSDAY, MARCH 20

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**Psalm:** 1

**Old Testament:** Jeremiah 17:5-10

**Gospel:** Luke 16:19-31

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*They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes. — Jeremiah 17:6*

I was in the second grade when I met Muriel. My family had recently moved back to New York City and purchased a house ten doors down from where she lived.

Our paths didn't cross right away. She was in Catholic school, and I was in public. She had her group of friends, and I was making a few of my own. She went to church on Sundays, and I wondered why I couldn't stay home from school on Jewish holidays.

One evening, our fathers recognized each other while walking home from the subway. They had known each other before immigrating to the United States.

And so, we met, and our friendship developed. As different as we were, we had a lot in common and quickly became best friends. We spent a lot of time talking about anything and everything. This is how I came to ask Muriel about God and her faith. Having been raised without faith, I had A LOT of questions.

Years later, I saw how faith in God carried her through the tragic and inexplicable loss of a family member. I finally learned to accept what I did not understand. I never questioned anyone's faith again, but still, I did not find my own.

In 2023, I emerged out of isolation from the pandemic, depleted of self-sufficiency but afraid to let go of the only thing I've ever known. I found St. Matthew's online, initially drawn in by the Haiti Benefit Concert and the Celebration Garden. I believe it was a sign from God telling me it was time. So, like a shrub in the desert, I tumbled into St. Matthew's. It is where I finally came to believe that to know God's love, I must lean into faith; asking about it would never be enough.

Fifty plus years later, and despite all my annoying questions, Muriel and I are still best friends.

*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.*

—Corinthians 12:9

– Gerry Hanson

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## FRIDAY, MARCH 21

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**Psalm:** 105:16-22     **Old Testament:** Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28

**Gospel:** Matthew 21:33-43

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*Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age...But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. —Genesis 37:3-4*

The North Carolina seashore is a remarkable place. Its natural beauty and essence make it really something special. And it's along those shores that my brothers and I have built strong ties and bonds with each other.

I am one of three children—the only girl and middle child between two rambunctious boys. We are blessed that, unlike Joseph and his brothers, our relationship has always been an excellent one; my brothers never felt less loved by my parents because of me. Together, my brothers and I boogie-boarded on thousands of waves, searched for sharks' teeth and elegant seashells for hours on end, and feasted on too many fried shrimp and hush puppies to count. Those were the early years.

Now, nearly four decades later, our beach time at Topsail Island is centered around meal planning for 17, early morning pickleball, and finding the best place to stake our umbrellas each day. The pleasant surprise is the joy we feel as we watch our children do the very same things we did on the very same shores that brought us so much happiness in those early years. We still hit the surf for a quick dip and search the shore for seashells, but the experience is amplified as we see our children relate so well to each other, just as we did.

And as we watch our children soak up the sun and salt water, I recognize the awesomeness of all that God has given to me and my brothers: each other, our parents, our planet, and our children—those beautiful souls relishing in the wonder of the natural world while building their own sibling bonds and cousin ties. For me, it's an indescribable feeling—it's God showing Himself to me, to all of us.

Dear Lord, please continue to watch over us and guide us in all we do. Grant us patience, strength, and peace as we move through our lives, especially in times of difficulty and struggle. In your name we pray. Amen.

– Sarah O'Connell

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## SATURDAY, MARCH 22

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**Psalm:** 103:1-4 (5-8) 9-12 **Old Testament:** Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

**Gospel:** Luke 15:11-32

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*He redeems your life from the grave and crowns you with mercy and loving-kindness; He satisfies you with good things, and your youth is renewed like an eagle's. —Psalm 103:4-5*

All my life, I have looked young for my age, probably because of my petite frame. But, ironically, for the majority of my life, I was in a room full of senior citizens—because of my medical conditions.

As a teen, I spent afternoons on dialysis with someone's grandmother or waited with a retiree in the Medicare line to renew benefits.

As a high school senior, I was fighting for my life instead of applying to colleges and graduating. My kidneys failed, and I spent 18 months in the ICU or IMC—after many seizures and code blues. My future looked dim. But I was saved when, a few years later, I received a kidney transplant.

After that, I spent most of my young adult years catching up to life and chasing my youth. I felt stuck in survival mode, pivoting between healthy and sick, and probably a little reckless with my new life.

One day, after a failed engagement and back home with my parents, while washing away my tears in the shower, I found myself praying, "Please, God, take this pain away and show me Your ways. My life is Yours." I felt God's embrace in that moment as if He was washing away my suffering with His loving kindness.

Over the years, I began to feel the load lift off my shoulders. Surviving became living, and living became thriving. I realized that life was never against me but for me. Gaining tools to connect with my spirit and with God, I felt authentically youthful with a sense of freedom, like a powerful eagle, soaring in the sky, just like God's promise.

This Lent, I pray that God continues to renew my life like an eagle's, with a youthfulness that isn't defined by life's circumstance, but is fueled by God's loving kindness. Amen.

– Zorana B. Rouse

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## SUNDAY, MARCH 23

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**Psalm:** 63:1-8

**Old Testament:** Exodus 3:1-15

**New Testament:** 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

**Gospel:** Luke 13:1-9

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*When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." —Exodus 3:4-5*

Thirty-five years ago, my wife, two children, and I were on vacation in the southwest of France where we visited Orador-sur-Glane, a village which was destroyed in WWII by German troops. Men were brought into barns and sheds where they were shot in the legs and doused with gasoline before the barns were set on fire. Women and children were herded into a church that was also set on fire; those who tried to escape through the windows were machine gunned. All in all, 643 people are recorded to have been murdered.

It was these ruins, maintained as a permanent memorial, that we went to see.

Many houses stand partially destroyed. The church is burnt out. A tram sits still on its rails. A sewing machine lays rusting in the remains of a house. The fire-twisted frame and wheels of a stroller rest in silent anguish in the ruins of the church. Though busy with visitors, the whole village is eerily quiet; it seemed that even nature had silenced her song.

Is this holy ground? I know it touched my soul.

I continually search for that thin space where I can feel that God is close to me, but mostly, it eludes me. Visiting Orador was one of those times when I felt the real presence of God, not in the destruction, not in the sadness, but in the quiet of a still small voice saying I am His and I am standing on holy ground.

Our Men's Group has just finished Bonhoeffer's "The Cost of Discipleship"—a really challenging read. One lesson I took from the study is that, as followers of Jesus (disciples), we live in God's kingdom and bring holy ground with us, especially when we interact with our neighbor.

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for the spirit of discipleship among us. We want to Be Your followers who Know You, Love You, Serve You, Praise and Glorify You. Amen.

– Linden Sanders

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## MONDAY, MARCH 24

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**Psalm:** 42:1-7

**Old Testament:** 2 Kings 5:1-15b

**Gospel:** Luke 4:23-30

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*Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. —2 Kings 5:1*

During my time on active duty as a career military officer, I was fortunate enough to receive many awards and accolades. Promotions and acceptance to graduate school also came my way, so I was feeling pretty full of myself—that I was excelling beyond any expectation. I was the Captain. I was the Commanding Officer. I was even recognized as a distinguished graduate of my hometown high school in Bowling Green, Ohio—complete with a quarter-page article in the local newspaper.

To my chagrin, however, whenever I made my way back to Bowling Green for a visit or a reunion, those accomplishments were never acknowledged. I had no status as a successful military officer to those who knew me from a younger age. I was still just my father's son—the young kid who played baseball, who pumped their gas at my dad's gas station, the quiet and introverted classmate who felt awkward in social settings. To them, that is how they still identified me, without any acknowledgment of the personal growth and accomplishments in between.

I gave this some thought now and then and came away with the idea that most were just jealous—that they had stayed in town and remained stagnant, while I made my own mark pursuing a career that was completely foreign to them. But, as I thought about it more, I came away with an epiphany—that only those who have known me for most of my life were able to trace the bounds of my humility, from a humble young man to an older version of myself who had allowed hubris to enter the fray. I had become someone that was out of sync with my true character—and they ignored that part of me. They knew, and I later figured out, that it was my humility and humble beginnings that grounded me and that gave me the building blocks I needed to do well.

Validation was no longer important or sought. For a time, however, I lost that.

– Anonymous



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## TUESDAY, MARCH 25

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**Psalm:** 45

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 7:10-14

**New Testament:** Hebrews 10:4-10

**Gospel:** Luke 1:26-38

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*And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God. Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. —Luke 1:36-38*

The Magnificat of Mary is a powerful and beloved hymn. There's a little something for everyone in the passage. But, to my mind, the Magnificat is not as affecting as the simple words that Mary offers a few verses earlier: *Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word* (Luke 1:38).

The story of God's grace toward Mary (in the form of an unexpected pregnancy) is intertwined with the story of God's grace toward her cousin Elizabeth (whose pregnancy is unexpected for a different reason).

As a woman who experienced several years of infertility, my heart tends to follow Elizabeth in this passage rather than Mary. How many years had Elizabeth suffered and prayed, cursing her womb, seemingly prevented by God from fulfilling her one purpose as a woman (according to her culture); and how great would Elizabeth's jealousy have been when her young cousin conceived, as it appeared, so quickly with her betrothed.

I admit that it was hard to see people who had everything I wanted and without much effort (or so it seemed). It was difficult to submit to God's will when I could hardly see past my grief and anger and jealousy. Yet Christ called me to address these emotions by submitting to God, even if I struggled with the submission, just as Mary did, and just as Christ himself did.

After much time, I was given the blessing of children, but I hold in my heart those who are still waiting for their prayers to be answered.

During this time of Lent, I will continue to examine how I struggle with submission to God and process whether I am ready to say, "Let it be with me according to Your word." May I accept Your will. Amen.

– Hilary Hultman-Lee

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## WEDNESDAY MARCH 26

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**Psalm:** 78:1-6 **Old Testament:** Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 5-9

**Gospel:** Matthew 5:17-19

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*But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children. —Deuteronomy 4:9*

When I was a kid, we went to church every Sunday, and if you would have asked me then, that felt like quite enough devotion. However, my dad made it a point to incorporate the teachings of the Bible into everyday life. Each morning before school, he would make breakfast for me and my brothers and sit with us while we ate. He would then read a passage from the Bible, ask us what we believed it meant, and encourage real thought and discussion. Once we had gone around giving our answers, my dad would apply the passage to a real-life scenario.

I've lost track of the number of times my dad offered to help different families with house projects, which ranged from moving boxes, to yard work, to repairs. Most of the time, it meant that my brothers and I were going to be doing the work while my dad supervised and used the power tools. I can remember thinking, "Why do I have to spend my weekend like this?" as I assembled what felt like hundreds of sandwiches with my family to pass out to workers building houses for Habitat for Humanity; and if I ever mustered the courage to ask, the answer was, "What would Jesus do?"

As I reflect on this passage and the ways my dad practiced how Jesus taught us to treat others, I am grateful to have that foundation in my life. I am a dad of two young boys now. As I look back to what I was taught, I strive to continue to teach that to my children.

As my dad would always ask as he dropped me off at school, "Who are you?" to which I would reply, "A son of God and an inheritor of His kingdom."

Amen.

– Oliver H. Massa Sr.

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## THURSDAY, MARCH 27

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**Psalm:** 95:6-11    **Old Testament:** Jeremiah 7:23-28

**Gospel:** Luke 11:14-23

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*Whoever does not gather with me scatters. —Luke 11:23*

Sometimes I feel like my life is “scattered.” Times when all the pieces seem to be falling apart. I can think of two such times in my life when things have felt not only scattered, but very scattered.

The first was in high school, when my parents broke up. During my parents’ divorce, I felt alone and confused. I was only 15 years old. One weekday, I was in so much pain that I decided to walk to the church nearby. I had gone to church before because I was “taught” to, but this time I “needed” to go. I entered and sat in a pew. The church was empty, quiet, and wonderful. After a while, I knelt to pray and to ask God for help—and I felt comforted.

The second time happened years later when my own marriage fell apart. Once again, God gathered me to Himself, and He comforted me through those difficult times.

During both divorces, so much felt ruined; the foundation for each family unit was scattered everywhere and left all of us in pieces. It was beyond hard, but I leaned on Him through a lot of prayer and going to church, and that sustained me until I could piece myself back together.

Sometimes when I’m traveling and away from St. Matt’s, I also feel scattered. There is something about praying together that makes me feel “whole” and at peace. I’m not sure how to explain this, but being with my church family always helps me feel less scattered in life.

Thank you, God, for wanting us to gather with each other and be with You and to share in Your hope, love, and grace. Amen.

– Sharon Muniz

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## FRIDAY, MARCH 28

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**Psalm:** 81:8-14    **Old Testament:** Hosea 14:1-9

**Gospel:** Mark 12:28-34

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*One of the scribes [asked], "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*—Mark 12:28-31

As a mom, I've loved each season of parenting, but children come with their own challenges. When they're babies, all you want is more sleep. When they're toddlers, you pray they don't stick their fingers into light sockets or climb the refrigerator (but maybe that's just my kids!).

Now that I have one in elementary school and one in middle school, I've entered what I call the M-Uber phase (pronounced Moo-ber)—where I taxi them to all their activities and constantly referee their nitpicking and fights. I often think to myself, "Please get along for five minutes!"

As I read today's Gospel reading, it makes me think: How do I teach them to love God with all their hearts but also to love each other? How do I teach them to show love, even when it seems impossible? This season of life feels like a dress rehearsal for how they'll interact with their future neighbors—those who might push their buttons or have different worldviews. How do I teach them to show kindness and love to those who push frustration or even hate?

I often find myself saying things like, "Give your sister some grace today; she had a huge test this morning," or "Your brother didn't sleep well last night and might take things too personally if you're being sarcastic." It's my way of trying to teach them that all people—siblings included—are human and might sometimes need a little extra grace.

Dear Lord, as we move through this season of Lent, help me remember, and help me teach my children, that love is not just about big gestures, but it is also about small moments of kindness and understanding, especially when they're hardest to offer. Amen.

– Kathleen Bellamy

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## SATURDAY, MARCH 29

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**Psalm:** 51:15-20    **Old Testament:** Hosea 6:1-6

**Gospel:** Luke 18:9-14

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*For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted. —Luke 18:14*

Living in Loudoun County, “the richest county in the U.S.,” coupled with having been raised in Potomac, Maryland, I find that it can be very hard not to get caught up in trying to “keep up with the Joneses.” (Ironically, by birth, I am in fact a Jones.)

I have faced constant pressures to provide everything for my family, struggling with feelings of failure when I don’t or when I can’t. And I face challenges in teaching my teenage children about what’s really important. I wonder if I’ve taught them the lessons of the joy of giving over receiving. I wonder if I’ve helped them to find the blessings in everything they have. I wonder if they know how blessed we truly are.

I, too, must learn this lesson, especially as I approach my...gulp...“mid-life” crisis years, struggling with these same questions and doubts. Wondering, “Am I enough?” “Have I provided enough for my children?”

We have just enough. We have a roof over our heads, dirty dishes, clothes in the hamper, gas in the tank, pictures from vacation, and family with whom we can still connect.

I know God has blessed our family in so many ways. I want to lead a modest, quiet life (though loud when praising with JOY!). And I believe I will be OK with that. I must choose to be thankful and not to chase the Joneses. I must choose to focus on what’s right in front of me.

Lord, help me to remain focused on You, even when I try the evil “keeping up” game, wondering if I am enough. Help me to remember that I am enough. Amen.

– Akila O’Grady

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## SUNDAY. MARCH 30

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**Psalm:** 32

**Old Testament:** Joshua 5:9-12

**New Testament:** 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

**Gospel:** Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

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*So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. —Luke 15:20*

I attended Catholic elementary school, high school, and college. Since the elementary school was not in the town that I lived in, my parents (mom mostly) drove me to and from school every day. In the afternoons this meant waiting with the other non-bussed students in the vestibule of the side entrance to the church until picked up. The wait was sometimes 45-60 minutes.

One day, when I was around 8 years old, I ventured into the church and spent some “quality time” looking at the stations of the cross that were displayed along each side of the church. It was a gray day, and the lighting was essentially off. It was then, in the dim, murky light of the winter afternoon filtering through dark stained glass, that I had my first casual chat with God.

As years passed with regular school assemblies for worship, I would fail to see the importance of consistent weekly worship. In college, I attended protestant worship experience during the school year with my future spouse. Married, weekly worship was important to my spouse, but as the years went by, I would not always attend fully. This led to my having other things to do on many Sundays and not attending at all.

Eventually, life happened. When it did, I would pray and/or return to the relevant church building seeking solace and comfort. God was always there, in various forms.

In considering this gospel, I think it's really important to understand that it applies to everyone—including me. Despite the inevitable times that I drift away, forget, decline, and/or overlook God in my life, the good news told here is that God is always there, waiting for me to return and engage as one of His loving children, always loved by God.

Dear God, thank you for Your loving kindness even when I don't know that I need it, and for always being ready with open arms to receive me when I realize I do. Amen.

– Bob Henry

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## MONDAY, MARCH 31

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**Psalm:** 30:1-6, 11-13    **Old Testament:** Isaiah 65:17-25

**Gospel:** John 4:45-54

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*But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress...They shall build houses and inhabit them...and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity . . . —Isaiah 65:18; 21-23*

These verses taken from Isaiah send a promise to everyone who holds true to the faith and what it really means to be a Christian.

During the Youth Group Mission Trip in 2024, I was in a group assigned to work on an elderly couple's house. One of them was in a wheelchair, the other had medical issues. The ramp to their front door was dangerous and needed to be rebuilt, the whole house needed painting, and the yard was overrun with webs, wasp nests, and moss. That week, I saw the kids from our St. Matt's Youth Group work extremely hard, in the scorching heat of the days, to the point of exhaustion by each evening. By the end of the week, the whole house was painted, wasp nests removed, walls cleaned, and the whole ramp was dug up and rebuilt. The family thanked the kids dearly and hugged them all.

I believe this work the Youth Group accomplished was a flicker in the present of what is promised to all of us. This experience was a glimpse of what's right and true.

The kids and I still talk about the times we had fun while working for and serving that elderly couple, like when we swatted down wasp nests. We all agreed that we were rewarded for our work as Christians just by seeing how important it was to that elderly couple, who couldn't stop thanking us.

I pray that everybody who reads this gets to participate in a service project and finds it as fulfilling as this one was to me, as I believe our works are not in vain. Most importantly, I pray that God's grace and direction may always lead and guide me to such work. Amen.

– Ben Merola

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## TUESDAY, APRIL 1

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**Psalm:** 46: 1-8

**Old Testament:** Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

**Gospel:** John 5:1-18

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*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*

—Psalm 46:1

On March 1st of 2005, I woke to the radio DJ listing the schools closed for the day due to snow. Ecstatic to hear my school, I did what any self-respecting high schooler would. I rolled over and went back to sleep.

A few hours later, I attempted to wake my mother on the couch and found she'd passed suddenly in the night. I spent the next few hours in denial before falling full into the anger phase of grief, where I spent the next several months.

Angry at the world, I turned to Buddhist meditation, the practice of emptying one's mind, desperate to quiet my inner noise. A key to meditation is to focus one's thoughts on your breath, note any wandering thoughts, and then return resolutely to silence and your breath. After nearly 20 years of practice, I've learned two things.

The first is that God is there in the silence. God speaks strong words when I let Him. God holds me in silence when I need Him.

The second is that it's OK to wander. It's OK to struggle. It's OK to fall. Acknowledge my stumble, breathe, refocus, try again.

God quiets whatever trouble I have, exactly how I need every time. God gives help exactly as I need—every time.

*Though its waters rage and foam, and though the mountains tremble at its tumult. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.*

—Psalm 46:3-4

Amen.

– Heather Tomaszek



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## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2

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**Psalm:** 145:8-9

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 49:8-15

**Gospel:** John 5:19-29

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*Jesus said, "the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing...The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished."—John 5:19-20 NRSV*

I have always been an advocate for mission trips. When my children were younger, I strongly encouraged them to participate in the annual church mission trip (honestly, I only had to encourage them once; after that, they advocated for themselves to go). We would have discussions about the many benefits of going on the trips, such as: serving those less fortunate, learning about people who lived in different areas of the country or world, and being the hands and feet of Jesus.

The part I saw myself playing in the mission trip scenarios was "support person." I was a member of the committee that selected the mission trip destinations; I helped to organize and execute fundraisers; I ensured that my kiddos had all the gear they needed for the trips; I was an all-around cheer leader.

But being a mission trip participant was an idea that I always rejected in my mind. All the usual excuses kept me safe at home: I don't have the time, my family members at home will need me, we might have to sleep on the floor and that would be uncomfortable, and if I'm totally honest, maybe I was afraid.

Fast forward a few years to when my children are young adults who continue to enjoy mission trips. There was a prodding thought that kept entering my mind—to take the leap and go on a mission trip. Oh, I tried to ignore that small voice in my head, but it didn't go away. After much prayerful consideration, I did join a mission trip team. It was challenging, but one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. God indeed showed me some of the greater works He has in store, and I was truly astonished.

Heavenly Father, help me to see all works that you are doing, and guide me to do what You would have me do, especially when it means stepping outside of my comfort zone. Amen.

– Maria Palmer

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## THURSDAY, APRIL 3

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**Psalm:** 106:6-7, 19-23    **Old Testament:** Exodus 32:7-14

**Gospel:** John 5:30-47

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*How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?*

—John 5:44

Tennis got me through one of the darkest times of my adult life. During COVID, I found myself at home, feeling alone, doing my best to care for a toddler, to assist my 3 other young children with Distance Learning, and to help my husband run a business, coupled with other family issues we were dealing with at the time. I found myself feeling more alone and overwhelmed than I had ever felt in my life. Then a good friend invited me to go with her to a tennis lesson.

With tennis, I found an outlet. I found exercise, friendships, competition, and self-confidence—not to mention the immediate GLORY I felt from winning a match, and the resulting praise from teammates! Validation that all my hard work had paid off! However, that feeling of glory, while intense, did not last. I still felt that there was something missing. I was incomplete.

I always knew it was God that was missing. My husband and I had looked for a Church that would help us feel at home and that would challenge us to deepen our faith. Then we found St. Matthew's. We were immediately welcomed into the church, and over time I became more involved. Through community events, the women's ministry, and service, I learned how to hear from God and follow the way of Jesus. I learned how to keep my focus on what is most important, not on what is most immediately gratifying.

It is difficult for me to admit that, with tennis, I was seeking my own glory. Yes, the sport helped get me through a hard time, and I have made many meaningful friendships, but it was never going to make me feel complete. As my relationship with God grows, I find myself becoming more whole. I find myself seeking less personal glory and finding a greater understanding of how His glory comes from my seeking to live according to His will.

Lord, the more I follow Your path for me, the more I understand where true and lasting joy, love, and peace can be found. Amen.

—Julie Kane

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## FRIDAY, APRIL 4

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**Psalm:** 34:15-22

**Old Testament:** Wisdom 2:1a, 12-24

**Gospel:** John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

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*The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and will save those whose spirits are crushed.* —Psalm 34:18

Sometime after our first anniversary, my husband and I decided it was time to start a family. It never occurred to us that we were part of a growing number of couples who would face infertility. After a while, my doctor suggested we see an infertility specialist. We embarked on a journey where we had inconclusive tests while our friends had babies. We smiled through baby showers and cried through baptisms. And we continued praying every month for good news.

Then our name came up on an adoption waiting list! After several months and a home-study, we got the call—a little girl was waiting for us! Kristi was, of course, the most beautiful baby we had ever seen!

As soon as we were eligible, we put in an application to adopt a sibling for Kristi. All went well until Gerry was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease. The agency felt this made us unsuitable as adoptive parents and, against the advice of their own consulting doctors, they turned us down.

Back to broken-hearted! Except, this time we had Kristi. Every time she called me "Mommy," I felt a conscious thrill.

We thanked God constantly for the gift of Kristi, but we continued to pray for a sibling for her. Fortunately, we had been on the list for another adoption agency. Once again, after a home-study and another wait, we got the call—a little girl was waiting for us!

With baby Karen, our family was now complete! Our broken hearts were healed.

And then, the day after Kristi's 11th birthday, Jonathan was born. What a bonus! His name came from a dream announcing my pregnancy to me.

We are so grateful to God and to their birth mothers for the gift of our daughters, and we are so grateful to God for the birth of our son.

O God, You heal the broken-hearted. Help me to trust that Your plan is best for me and that You will carry me through the hard times, even when I don't understand. Amen.

– Adrienne Miller

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## SATURDAY, APRIL 5

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**Psalms:** 7:6-11

**Old Testament:** Jeremiah 11:18-20

**Gospel:** John 7:37-52

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*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.*

—John 7:37-38

When I was 14, after attending confirmation classes in the Glendale Reformed Church Sunday School for a year, I made my confirmation in that church. We had studied various parts of the Bible and were required to memorize the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. It was through these classes that I started to understand what it was to be a Christian. If I believed in Jesus and took my concerns, fears, and hopes to Him in prayer, my life would be so much better—not because He would provide everything I wanted but that He would provide what I needed. So, I started to pray daily.

Talking to Jesus every day, my prayers often centered around the challenges going on in my life. I'll never forget one particular such time.

In January 1989, my 18-year-old son, Bobby, was placed on a transplant list. Six days later we received a call from the hospital—they had a kidney for him. When we arrived at the hospital we were greeted by the transplant team waiting to prep him for surgery. As they wheeled him away, I suddenly felt all alone.

I started to pray. I asked God to be with the surgical team, to guide the surgeon's hand, and to wrap His loving arms around my son. A peaceful calm suddenly flowed over me, and at that moment, I believed that my son would be alright. After a four-hour surgery, he was—and twelve days later, Bobby walked out of the hospital with a new kidney.

Now when I talk to God I always thank Him for loving me and for blessing me with another day. I pray for friends and family who are sick or sad, and I ask Jesus to keep them all safe. I pray for our country. And I pray for myself, asking for forgiveness, patience, hope, and humility. I know that when I am thirsty I can turn to Him for His Living Water.

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me and being with me through all the challenges in my life. Your Living Water gives me hope, courage, and faith. Amen.

– Wilma Sargent

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## SUNDAY, APRIL 6

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**Psalm:** 126

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 43:16-21

**New Testament:** Philippians 3:4b-14

**Gospel:** John 12:1-8

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*Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy . . . The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed . . . Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy...Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves. —Psalm 126:2-7*

A joke was made yesterday at our friend Raishawn's funeral. I was there with his best friend, Bryant. We joked about our giant CD books back in the day. He also stressed how important it is not to just store your photos on social media. Raishawn's family knew where his photos were in Myspace, but all the links were broken. Don't take physical photos and music for granted.

I ran into another of Raishawn's friends there, Marshall. I had not seen him in forever, probably a decade. Marshall said he had not seen Raishawn in four years. Raishawn had moved to Florida several years earlier.

Raishawn had sickle cell anemia and an enlarged heart. I used to see him and Marshall together at Curtis', the friend who introduced us. Marshall was a very gruff white Irish gentleman who did not look to be someone who would be best friends with Raishawn. At first they fought, physically, but Raishawn, even disabled, had learned Taekwondo to defend himself and surprised Marshall. They became good friends after that, even though they came from very different backgrounds. One man, a Black son of a single mother and aunt who raised him despite his challenges. The other, a White Irish Catholic-ish boy who just happened to live in the same neighborhood in Herndon. Not too far from Saint Matthew's.

No one expected Raishawn to make it to 27, let alone 42 years old. He fought every day to live and did so against all kinds of odds stacked against him. He was one of the strongest men I ever met, and Marshall agreed, speaking at his funeral and later to me at the reception.

You would not expect to see a tattooed black-leather-coat-wearing Irishman cry at a Black man's funeral, but there he was, in front of everyone for a second, before walking away without finishing his testimonial.

I will miss Raishawn, but I know I will see him again.

*The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed. —Psalm 126:4*

Amen.

—Jason Wallace

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## MONDAY, APRIL 7

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**Psalm:** 23    **Old Testament:** Susanna [1-9, 15-29, 34-40], 41-62

**Gospel:** John 8:12-20

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*The Lord heard her cry. Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, and he shouted with a loud voice, "I want no part in shedding this woman's blood!" . . . Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in him . . . Thus innocent blood was spared that day.*  
—Susanna 1-9,15-29,34-40, 41-62

Until preparing to write this devotional, I had never heard about Susanna, let alone in terms of a separate book of the Bible. It turns out that it is not a separate book of the Bible. Rather, it is the 13th chapter of the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. Who knew? In fact, none of my Bibles (and I have a bunch) has a 13th chapter in the book of Daniel. But what really got me about this reading is how it connects to our present times.

I am writing this on the day after Election Day. Our elections have been getting more and more nasty, and this one took the cake. Right? Can I get a Hallelujah here? But it's decided now. For me, I am thinking more and more about how people will talk to me and relate to me based on politics.

I don't want to be judged and condemned for my beliefs, the way that Susanna was for standing firm in hers to be faithful. But what really amazes me about her story is that God called on Daniel, a complete stranger, to show that Susanna was blessed and innocent. He did this by using a normal person to act on His behalf. Ultimately, through Daniel's persistence, the truth was revealed, and Susanna was spared.

For me, Daniel coming to Susanna's defense, even though he didn't know her, is a wonderful example of how I should always treat others, even when I do not know them or when we may have different beliefs or feelings about things—like politics.

The other thing I took away from this chapter was how Susanna defended herself. This was particularly extraordinary for her time. She reached out to God. What a great concept! For me, during this change in Presidency, that certainly sounds like a great idea. The alternatives of sulking or depression or overspending or overeating during this time do not sound like something I want for my life. I think Susanna would have agreed.

Lord, help me remember to look out for my fellow man during what may be trying times in our country. Help me know that I am called to love *all* people, not just those who think like me. Amen.

– Vicki Nelson

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## TUESDAY, APRIL 8

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**Psalm:** 102:15-22

**Old Testament:** Numbers 21:4-9

**Gospel:** John 8:21-30

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*He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer. —Psalm 102:17*

I have a friend who has a faith that I admire and wish I could emulate. Her family struggles to make ends meet from month to month, yet she knows that God is in control of everything and will take care of her and her family. She knows deep in her gut that God cares for her and will look after her and her family no matter what. She knows that God answers prayers, so she lets God know what she needs.

Praying for my own needs has always been challenging for me. I can pray for others, but when I try to open my heart, I struggle to find the words. Does God hear me when I pray? Are my prayers worthy? Do my prayers even matter? Yet this passage and many others in the Bible tell me that God does listen to prayer, and maybe I don't need to have the perfect words. Where is my faith if I cannot trust God with my most basic needs?

Even though she has very little, my friend has so much faith and trust in God that she always acts with compassion toward others. She even shares food when she has a little extra, knowing that the needs of her family will be met. She is living out the commandment to "love one another" regardless of her circumstances. That is the faith that I want. This passage reassures me that I can walk in that faith.

Creator God, thank you for loving me and guiding me every day. I know You hear my prayers for others. Help me to pray from my heart for what I need. Amen.

– Susy Nixon

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## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9

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**Psalm:** Canticle 13    **Old Testament:** Daniel 3:14-20, 24-28

**Gospel:** John 8:31-42

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*The hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed.*  
—Daniel 3:27

We were waiting for our meals at the Great American Grill when my father made a miracle of himself. As he reached for the breadbasket, he extended his arm over a candle, and his shirt cuff was instantly engulfed in smoky blue fire. My father backed up his chair as the faint tendrils crawled up his arm. He stood up with his back to a window that was cracked open to the night air, and the flames audibly whooshed up. For an instant, he was a pillar of fire, a man in a silenced room with a hundred startled diners staring at him. But just as its sudden appearance, the flames spontaneously flashed out.

My father was not hurt and, after the shock, made a few quips; and people started tucking back into their food, and the conversation got back up to a din. My father explained to us at the table that he had worn the shirt during an ill-thought-out decision to drive a riding lawnmower up a ramp. The mower had tipped over, and he found himself trapped under it, soaking in a pool of gasoline. Though the shirt was laundered, some residual gas fumes must have ignited when he brushed the candle, not hot enough to singe the shirt fabric but conjuring an impressive pyrotechnical feat nonetheless.

I only glimpsed the spectacle out of the corner of my eye, but I sat directly across the table from the momentary inferno. Today I think of the patrons on the far side of the restaurant. They were further away from the show, but not knowing the mechanics of the conflagration, they were the ones who could only view the spectacle as a momentary miracle.

I like to think these patrons departed the restaurant with a faith newly forged by a fiery furnace, a witness to this specter of spontaneous combustion, carrying a testament to tell the skeptics of its survivability and of hidden phoenixes in our midst.

Dear Lord, grant me the perspective to see the miracles that abound in Your world so as to foster a faith newly forged in the fire of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

—Justin Traum



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## THURSDAY, APRIL 10

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**Psalm:** 105:4-11

**Old Testament:** Genesis 17:1-8

**Gospel:** John 8:51-59

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*Jesus said, "Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad." Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. —John 8:56-59*

I can relate to the literal lens that the Jews are using to look at and listen to Jesus in today's reading from John's gospel. They are struggling to make sense of Jesus. He says he knows Abraham, yet he is not even fifty years old. They question how he can claim to grant eternal life when even revered figures like Abraham and the prophets have died. Yes, I can relate.

I feel safest in a logical, black-and-white world, avoiding the gray at all costs. Because of this, I face the same challenges as the Jews in this passage. I often struggle with contradictions and logic/reasoning gaps in biblical passages. This can sometimes challenge my faith in God.

Thankfully, the St. Matt's community helps me focus less on the literal words and more on God's message. Each Sunday, I am reminded to be selfless, generous, and humble. I am challenged to love everyone everywhere, always. I am accepted for who I am, but at the same time challenged to be better.

St. Matt's teaches me to be a kinder and more loving person. I can't say I get it right every time, or even half of the time, but I believe this is the message Jesus wants us to receive. So, regardless of whether I can make sense of every passage in the Bible, St. Matt's has taught me that Jesus' true teachings are often in the gray.

I pray that I may always look beyond the literal words of scripture to see the true teachings of Jesus. Amen.

– Alexis Sather

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## FRIDAY, APRIL 11

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**Psalm:** 18:1-7

**Old Testament:** Jeremiah 20:7-13

**Gospel:** John 10:31-42

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*I called upon the Lord in my distress and cried out to my God for help. He heard my voice from his heavenly dwelling; my cry of anguish came to his ears. —Psalm 18:5-7*

There have been many times throughout my life when I have been in distress and called to the Lord for His help. One such time immediately comes to mind. It happened last year.

All year, in addition to working as a physical therapist, I had been taking classes and studying for several hours on weekends to prepare for a certification exam. The weeklong period of intensive studying and the exam days were finally here, and it was go time! I was very stressed. I do not like written tests, and I was going to have to take 8 of them.

I remember praying each night for God to give me the strength to get through this and to help me remain calm so I could show the proctors my skills. Throughout the week, I had several “God Moments” where I heard Him answering my prayers. Once, I received a picture from a friend with the quote, “You can do this!” Many times, I received text messages from friends and family telling me they were praying for me. And when the head of the program asked me one day at lunch if I wanted to come out and learn under his mentorship—Wow?! He even asked, “Do you feel more comfortable now?”

It was all these words spoken to me that were the reassurance and answer to my prayers. Everyone was asking me how I was so calm on exam day. Truly, the only reason I have is, “He heard my voice from his heavenly dwelling.”

Thank you, God, for hearing my voice and giving me the strength to stay calm and to get through the intense preparation and certification exams. Thank you for answering my prayers. Amen.

– Emily Stevens

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## SATURDAY, APRIL 12

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**Psalm:** 85:1-7

**Old Testament:** Ezekiel 37:21-28

**Gospel:** John 11:45-53

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*I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from every quarter, and bring them to their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel.* —Ezekiel 37:21-22

I recently watched "More Dogs," a play that showed the assimilation of immigrants, specifically Irish immigrants, in the 1820s into their new home culture for their ongoing survival. The show portrayed these transitions through minimal set pieces using motion, song, and dance. During this transition, people lost their language, and trying to "fit in" with the dominant society of their new homeland, often broke away from their ancestral families. The play likened this process to the domestication of wild wolves into the pets we train and welcome into our homes.

One of my favorite things about the United States is that we've welcomed all walks of people from all over the world. Growing up in Washington, D.C., almost everyone I know (or their parents) is from somewhere else. Two of my best high school friends were Russian and lived in the Russian embassy, and we were incredibly close. I've also known a bunch of people from Bolling Air Force Base, itself a mix of people who have been traveling around the U.S. (typically rotating every two years). While my friends came from different backgrounds with different dialects, this did not stop us from being friends.

Often, I hear irritation and complaints that someone on a help line on the phone, or in person, doesn't speak "the language," or speaks English with a thick accent—probably something I've been guilty of myself in recent years.

I'm reminded of the United Nations Protection of Indigenous Culture Program. One of its aims is to support the preservation of languages in danger of extinction. Attention to this need was brought because every two weeks an indigenous language was being lost.

I truly hope that, as I did in my younger days, I will welcome those that are separate and make space to understand others without forcing them to become just like me.

*Show us your mercy, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.* —Psalm 85:7

Amen.

– Tom Leary

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## PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 13

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**Psalms:** 31:9-16

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 50:4-9a

**New Testament:** Philippians 2:5-11

**Gospel:** Luke 19:28-40, Luke 22:14-23:56

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*As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" —Luke 19:28-40*

The email came out of the blue, in the middle of a perfectly pleasant Tuesday afternoon. At first, I was excited to hear from my old college friend, someone I had helped to get a job a few years back. But as I began to read, a knot grew in the pit of my stomach. My friend had written to tell me what a horrible person I was. She said she had been hurt years ago by how I acted. She was unwilling to forgive me.

But I had no idea what I'd done wrong.

I spent days ruminating on our every interaction, asking mutual friends to be brutally honest with me, wondering how I could have missed something so obviously painful to her. Was I self-absorbed and blind to my own failings? Maybe I really was a terrible person!

Although it was more than two decades ago, I still think about my friend and that email from time to time, especially on Palm Sunday. I think about her when I read about the crowd waving palms and praising Jesus, affirming his worthiness to be their King, and then four days later shouting, "Crucify him!"

We are all (even Jesus) liked by some people, disliked by others, and sometimes both by the very same people—which is confusing, and it hurts.

But Jesus was who he was regardless of whether the crowd adored him or reviled him. He was God's son, and the voice he listened to was God's. And when my old college friend's words play on repeat in my head, I try to remember that I am who I am regardless of what others think of me. I am God's beloved child—and so are you—and the voice we listen to is God's.

God, like us, your son Jesus faced rejection and abandonment by people he thought liked him and cared about him. Give us the strength and courage to listen less to what others think, and more to your voice, so that we may rest in the blessed assurance of your love for us. Amen.

– Genevieve Davis

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## MONDAY, APRIL 14

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**Psalm:** 36: 5-11

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 42:1-9

**New Testament:** Hebrews 9:11-15

**Gospel:** John 12:1-11

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*Jesus said, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."—John 12:8*

When I was a young teacher in the 1960s, I had two students (sisters) who were absent a lot; however, both were never absent on the same day. While many absentees fell behind in their work, these two girls were always prompt with their assignments even when absent. And they were never absent on test days. I was stunned when I learned that their reason for staying home was to take care of a young sibling while their single mother worked.

From 1984-2002, I taught in a school inside the Dallas city limits; but because it was outside the Dallas Independent School District, it was considered a more desirable place for foreign students. And so, as turmoil waxed and waned in the world at large, a lot of students who had been brought out of danger entered our classrooms. Some were the children of the wealthy whose parents had gotten them away to safety; some were refugees who had been rescued by various aid agencies.

At one point I had a group of very thin young men who were obviously poor and underfed. One followed me back to the classroom at the end of lunch one day literally in tears. He said, "The food they threw away today could have fed my village for a week!" I was stunned and saddened to learn what he had gone through.

For the past few years, I've been a member of a local senior center. The weekday lunch they offer is free for members over 60, with a sliding suggested donation based on monthly income. Lately, I've noticed an increase in the number of people who donate \$1 or who give nothing at all. Many also pay \$1 for a round-trip bus ticket to and from their homes each day. It makes me wonder about the existence of poverty at the other end of the age spectrum.

While Jesus was clearly aware of poverty, I regret that I'm often surprised when I unexpectedly become aware of it in unexpected situations.

Dear Lord, please open my eyes to the needs of others and how I can best serve them. Amen.

– Panita Jones Greer

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## TUESDAY, APRIL 15

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**Psalm:** 71:1-14

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 49:1-7

**New Testament:** 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

**Gospel:** John 12:20-36

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*Where is the wise person? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? . . . Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the lord." —1 Corinthians: 1:20-31*

The Bible often strikes me as a thoroughly modern book. It's not just that it's timeless, but that it's timely. Today's Gospel reading is a case in point. It is as if Paul, writing 2000 years ago, knew exactly what the world would be like today. In 1 Corinthians, we come face to face with the stark contrast between the way of the world and the way of God, between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God.

The world says, "Only the strong survive."

**God says, "Whoever loses his life for me will save it."**

The world says, "An eye for an eye."

**God says, "Turn the other cheek."**

The world says, "He who dies with the most toys wins."

**God says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

The world uses "intelligence" to deny God.

**God uses our foolishness to point us to our need for Jesus.**

(And let's face it; when all is said and done, who of us can't be pretty darn foolish?)

We hear so much about "post-traumatic stress syndrome," but what about post-traumatic growth syndrome? It is *weakness*—the hard stuff in life—that is often the greatest catalyst to our spiritual (and personal) growth and development. One way of understanding this is that it is often our weaknesses, not our strengths, that make it easier for other people to love us.

Finally, this passage tells us that we don't need to be wise by human standards, or influential, or part of the in-crowd. The Bible is the story of people who were flawed but used God, nonetheless. Their biggest asset was not their ability but rather their availability to be used by God.

And so, the question is, no matter what we think our faults and failings might be, will we let God use them—and us—to achieve his purposes in the world?

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## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16

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**Psalm:** 70

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 50:4-9a

**New Testament:** Hebrews 12:1-3

**Gospel:** John 13:21-32

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*The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens – awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.* —Isaiah 50:4-5

This passage speaks to me. Words have power, and I so want to “sustain the weary” with my words. I want to teach and support those that I can. In my life, that includes pet parents struggling with aging pets, needing tools to confidently care well for their pets. It includes finding the words to explain to my son why things happen, why lying is bad, and why singing the “f” word in a Taylor Swift song is a bad habit.

These are my intentions, and they require that I also “listen as those who are taught.” If I am not open to learning the challenges faced by a particular family pet, I certainly cannot teach how to overcome them. If I do not understand why my son engages in certain habits, I will not be able to guide him to better ones.

I have this deep conviction that the whole point of language is to communicate. I know this sounds obvious, yet I often hear words used to deflect, equivocate, and obfuscate. I catch myself giving evasive answers when my six-year-old asks a question that makes me uncomfortable. The result is increased confusion, which is clearly written on his face. On the other hand, if instead of responding immediately, I ask for clarification—and then listen—I have the opportunity to learn his perspective and what is behind his question. Often, it is not what I assumed.

This Lent, I pray that God helps me to not merely hear, but to listen, so I can teach what needs to be taught, and learn what I need to learn. That I may sustain myself and help others to be sustained. Amen.

– Anna Hodges

## ———— MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 17 ————

**Psalm:** 116:1, 10-17   **Old Testament:** Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

**New Testament:** 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

**Gospel:** John 13:1-17, 31b-35

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*Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."—John 13:34*

I have become increasingly disturbed lately by the lack of civility with which it seems people treat each other. It's like we are so intent on forcing our beliefs and opinions on others that we never stop to think that their beliefs and opinions can be equally valid—and might even be right. Our discussions tend to be less about sharing information and more about pushing our views on others.

What has caused us to become so self-focused that we cannot accept the value of opinions expressed by others? Is it the Internet and media that make it so easy to find a continuous stream of information that supports our already existing opinions to the exclusion of other information? Are we so arrogant that we consider any opinions that conflict with our own to be wrong? Whether it be sports, politics, or who makes the best soup, it seems like we think our opinion is the only one that matters.

It is not just that we disagree with others, it is the mean-spirited attacks we make on others that I find particularly troubling. The disciples of Jesus had their disagreements, but they were still able to follow and learn from Him. It wasn't about who won or who lost. He helped them understand there was a bigger prize to be had if they respected each other and worked for the good of all. The golden rule was not intended to be followed only if both parties agree on an issue.

I believe we are called to respect those who disagree with us and honor their opinions. By doing so, we may find the truth of the issue lies in the middle and not in one extreme or another.

Bless us with love, O Merciful God, that we may love as You love, that we may show patience, tolerance, kindness, caring, and love to all! Amen.

– Darrell Breed



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## GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 18

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**Psalm:** 22

**Old Testament:** Isaiah 52:13-53:12

**New Testament:** Hebrews 10:16-25

**Gospel:** John 18:1-19:42

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*They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!"* —John 19:15

Our church didn't meet in person on Good Friday of 2020, but my family was grateful to have the sense of normalcy that came from watching the vestry read the Passion story for the online service.

We were at home, gathered around my computer at the dining table. When it came time to shout, 'Crucify him!' I saw my chance. There was no congregation to offend. No priest to call me into his office come Easter Monday. So, I did what I have always wanted to do during the reading of the Passion, I cried, "Don't do it! Release Jesus!"

My children were appropriately scandalized. My husband said something about finally getting it out of my system. (We'd talked about this before.) The service on the screen, of course, continued as if nothing had happened. But I finally got to say it—to cry out against this horrible, terrible story of violence and betrayal and destruction of holiness.

And it didn't make me feel one bit better.

The Passion story is not a story I can—or should—try to change. It's a story I need to remember, in all its terrible detail. I need to be reminded that I need Jesus to be crucified—I need the grace and reconciliation He sets in motion through His perfect obedience even to death on the cross.

Merciful God, on this holy day, give me courage to face the suffering of the cross, so that I, knowing the depth of my need, might find equal joy in Your saving grace. Amen.

– Kara Laughlin

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## HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 19

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**Psalm:** 31:1-4, 15-16 **Old Testament:** Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

**New Testament:** 1 Peter 4:1-8

**Gospel:** John 19:38-42

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*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."*

—Lamentations 3:22-24

In the wee hours of the morning, when I wake due to some body part being inconvenienced by my sleeping position (yes, I'm getting older), I think about Death, specifically mine. For the record, I'm not suicidal. But in the very still, quiet of those hours, I think about my mom, dad, and brother.

I think about how my daughters never got to know my dad with his wicked sense of humor. Or hear their Uncle Daniel make up outrageously exaggerated stories about growing up with their mother. More than anything, I really miss talking with my mom. I never understood how important a role she played in my life until she was gone. Mom and I had our rough spots in our relationship, as all do, but she always taught me to trust in God. When I would get worked up and anxious about something, Mom would remind me that "God is in control, and He has a plan, and I need to trust Him always." I've been worrying about not being able to see my family again when I die. I really want to go to Heaven so I can see them again.

I've believed in God as long as I can remember (thanks, Mom!), but I've never had a close personal relationship with Him. I know that my number will one day be up, and that is driving me to really focus on building that relationship with God. I've started Education for Ministry classes (highly recommend!), and I'm attending an online Bible Study with women all up and down the East Coast.

I'm also doing something that I have never done—discussing my faith with work peers to understand their relationship with God. These are some of the very best conversations I've ever had with them. My friends remind me that no matter how weak my faith has been in the past, I should remember, *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is his faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion" says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."*

—Lamentations 3:22-24

Father God, I am leaning into Your faithfulness and looking forward to the day I see my family again. Amen.

– Katie Robertson

## ————— EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 20 —————

**Psalm:** 118:1-2, 14-24    **Old Testament:** Isaiah 65:17-25

**New Testament:** 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

**Gospel:** John 20:1-18

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*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent – its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. —Isaiah 65:25*

I was walking down the church hallway one evening, and I heard the voices of a couple of young ladies in the ladies' room. I just assumed it was a couple of our Youth Group members, and it sounded like they were approaching the door. So, I hid around the corner, thinking I'd play a little joke and jump out at them.

They came out the door and around the corner.

I jumped out.

They threw up their arms, and screamed, "EEK!!!!"

To my deep chagrin, they were not teenagers from the Youth Group. They were not members of the church at all. They were from a Narcotics Anonymous meeting held in a room in another building. I turned beet red, absolutely mortified.

As quickly as the words could come out of my mouth, I began apologizing profusely, explaining that I was the pastor of the church, that I thought they were teenagers in our Youth Group, and that I thought I'd play a little practical joke. They were both very gracious and laughed. One even said (when she caught her breath), "Oh, I do things like that all the time."

It didn't help.

I wondered, once again, why I seem to have a propensity to do such stupid things.

The scripture from Isaiah appointed for today closes with the words, "They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord." It's the culmination of a clear promise that we celebrate today on Easter: The world will be set right. The resurrection of Jesus, and of all those we love but see no longer, is perhaps the most obvious example of this. But it's also a promise that we will be saved from ourselves, and from our ability to cause others distress. For me, that day can't come soon enough.

– Rev. Rob Merola

# CELEBRATE LENT

*WITH ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH*

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Bible Study, Events, Recipes and more:  
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## HOLY WEEK SERVICES

### **PALM SUNDAY**

SUNDAY, APRIL 13TH AT 8, 9:30, & 11 AM

### **MAUNDY THURSDAY**

THURSDAY, APRIL 17TH AT 7 PM

### **GOOD FRIDAY**

APRIL 18TH AT NOON & 7 PM

### **HOLY SATURDAY**

APRIL 19TH AT 10 AM



## EASTER SERVICES

**SUNDAY, APRIL 20TH**

**6 AM** - EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE

**9:30 AM** - FESTIVAL SERVICE WITH BAND

**11:15 AM** - CHOIR SERVICE

[stmtts.org/Easter](http://stmtts.org/Easter)