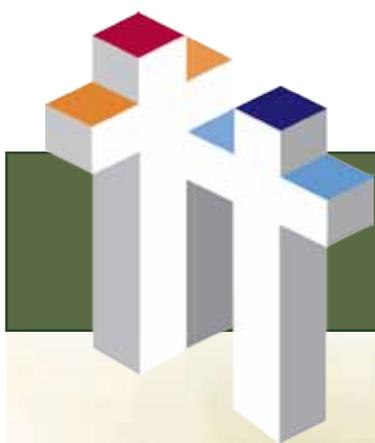


WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lenten Devotional

2020



Introduction

Just as daily physical exercise helps to maintain healthy bodies, daily devotions are exercise for spiritual health. This devotional guide is offered in the hope that each of us will take the time, during the season of lent, to deepen our faith. The passages we will look at flow from our overall theme which is, "keeping the Sabbath holy." Sunday worship during the six weeks of lent will focus on this message as we seek to center our lives on God and cease, rest, embrace and feast during Sabbath time.

Along with Bible verses, each day's devotion offers a reflection and prayer composed by members of the Westminster community. The Sunday meditations come from favorite sources.

So dive in! Set aside a few minutes daily to read the scripture passage, the reflection and pray/meditate on their meaning in your life. Hopefully, you will carry the message with you through the day to...find rest, peace and restoration for your life. Receive this gift of Sabbath rest that God has designed for us.

February 27

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

— Genesis 1:31-2:3

How does this make you think of God? Is this some incomprehensible being or do you think of God as some old, tired man?

Genesis means beginning, and in this beginning a creator of infinite wisdom and power sanctified the Sabbath. When you make something in arts, crafts, music sewing, cooking machinery....does this make you feel satisfied? You have created something from chaos. Think how God felt when the earth was done.

When I think of creation I think of the miracle of birth, not only of a child but of the earth itself. We care and nurture a child, watching it grown as God did with our planet. This is a beautiful story of how the world came into being by the will and power of God. It is an amazing miracle. It is hard to imagine a force so strong and mighty, especially one that is not seen or heard.

As I grew, I think I placed my expectations on God – to be like a superhero, to stop suffering, dispatch the guilty and vindicate my faith. But God's solutions are not like those of superheroes. His solution is to be there in times of trouble, gladness and sorrow through prayer. He is always with us; He cares about us and loves us.

PRAYER:

I pray to have eyes that see the best in people, a heart that forgives the worst, a mind that forgets the bad and a soul that never loses faith in God, our creator. Amen.

— Gwen Fraser

February 28

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

— Matthew 6:25-33

Matthew 6 reminds me of a lesson I heard in my childhood. My mother, and I in later years, would fret for hours about what we would wear or how we would style our hair to an important event. I can remember my grandfather telling her to not be focused on her outward appearance. He would say "The smile on your face has the potential to light up a room; your makeup, hairstyle and clothes are insignificant." These words were embedded in my subconscious from an early age.

As I entered my teenage years I was so concerned with looks and my body image. On night when I was getting ready to go out and he told me "It is what is on the inside that counts. Put a smile on your face and have kindness in your heart." You will have a happier life if you develop a good picture of what you are about on the inside. This is a difficult concept for a young woman to understand.

Our society covets external beauty; however in the kingdom of heaven it is inner beauty that pleases God. In interpersonal relationships, people will rarely remember what you wore or how you styled your hair or even the words that you spoke to them. They will remember the way you make them feel.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help me meet each person this day with a smile on my face and kindness in my heart.

— Peggy Canose

February 29

Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, 'We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.' 'God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens. When he gave to the wind its weight, and apportioned out the waters by measure; when he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the thunderbolt; then he saw it and declared it; he established it, and searched it out. And he said to humankind, "Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

— Job 28:20-28

When I was in my twenties, my father told me a joke: "A teenager thought his parents were so dumb, but by the time he reached the age of 21 his parents had become smart!" It's all a matter of perspective- and maturity through understanding. As we grow in our knowledge of the Lord and how He expects us to live our lives, this understanding leads to wisdom.

From the very beginning of Creation, God has been all-knowing and ever-present. When we "fear the Lord" we show reverence and acknowledge this awesome power. In this case, the word "fear" does not have its customary meaning of being in danger or being threatened.

It is a blessing to continue to grow in this special understanding that can lead to wisdom in our personal lives.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, during this Lenten Season, help us to search our hearts for an understanding of how you would have us live. Grant us the strength and wisdom to do your will and to do some small thing each day that makes a difference. Amen.

— Roberta Sarraf

Sunday, March 1

Scripture:

Exodus 20:8-11
Deuteronomy 5:12-15

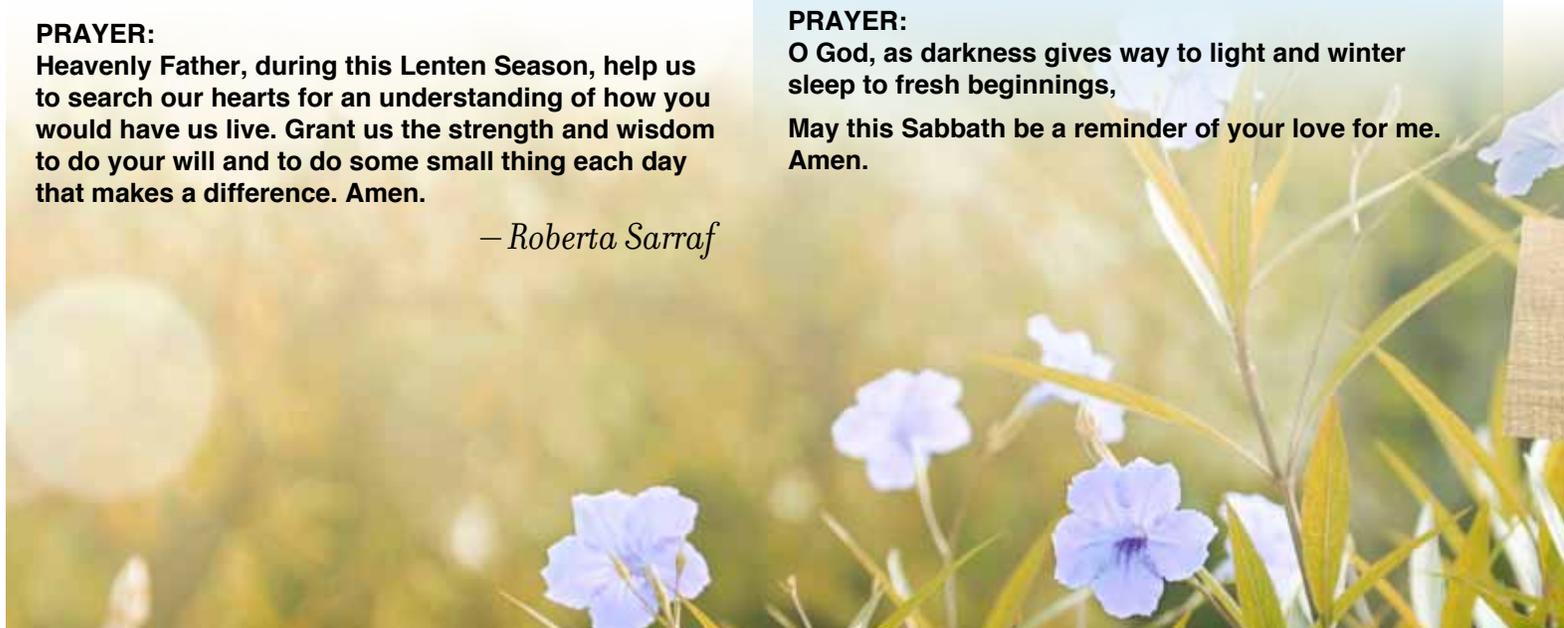
Meditation:

Well of life,
Bless my heart with the gifts of Sabbath,
The presence of your love in my pulse,
Your glory in my chest,
And Your wonder in my breath.
Bless my eyes with the gifts of Sabbath,
The beauty of the candlesticks,
The cup and bread.
Bless my lips with the gifts of Sabbath,
Rejoicing in song and prayer,
Our melodies ancient and new.
Bless my ears with the gift of Sabbath,
Hymns and praises,
The songs of old,
And blessed words of Scripture.
Bless my soul with the gifts of Sabbath,
Awe and thanksgiving,
Calm and surrender,
Beauty, righteousness, and peace.

(adapted from "For the Arrival of Shabbat" by Alden Solovy in This Grateful Heart, 2017)

PRAYER:

**O God, as darkness gives way to light and winter sleep to fresh beginnings,
May this Sabbath be a reminder of your love for me.
Amen.**



March 2

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

— *Psalm 1:1-6*

This reference to trees affirms my deep sense of joy and presence of God when I am in the woods. There is a forest park very near my home and I can see the path leading the way in from my window. When I choose to break away from wrestling with daily issues and trivial distractions and go walk among the trees, I am at peace. There the beauty of nature, the sounds, the feeling of dappled sunshine on my face is indeed my happy place.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, let me be as the trees, my face upturned towards you. Growing in your light. Prospering as I follow you and let me not get lost in doubtful thoughts. Let me plant myself along your path, grow my roots deep and yield good fruit.

— *Allison McGee*

March 3

O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; your faithfulness comes from me. Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

— *Hosea 14:8-9*

On my desk at this very moment sit three statues. One is of Sidney Crosby, because I so admire his grit and determination. Another is famed director J.J. Abrams, because I feel like sometimes life could use some direction. And the third is a difficult to describe monster, hideous and ugly, wearing a Superman costume. I got this little guy in seminary to remind me that something doesn't need to be perfect to be awesome. As I read this passage from Hosea, I wonder what the difference between these little figurines and idols would be. Don't I have some idols sitting on my desk right now?

No, or at least I don't think so anyway. An idol is something that supersedes the value we give to God. My bet is that many of us have idols, and few of those are statues of any kind. Some folks value money over God. Some folks value their political party over God. Some value their own identity over God.

Hosea wants to condemn these things not because they're bad for you (they are), but more because they will never, ever, match the power and love that God has. So go ahead and hold on to the Superman action figures, but remember to keep God in God's proper place.

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for the love and guidance you give me each day. Help me to place You above all else so I may faithfully follow your way. Amen.

— *Jason Freyer*



March 4

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

— Luke 10:38-42

As I read and study the Bible, I am always amazed at how it speaks to us on a daily basis, even this many years later.

While my name is not Martha, I do have a sister named Mary, who I love dearly. However, living inside of me there is definitely a thriving Martha who often controls my thoughts and actions.

While I love entertaining my family, especially at the holidays, I have on occasion missed the most important part of the event. Yes, the house is decorated top to bottom, there is more food than can possibly be eaten, and everyone seems to have a wonderful time, even planning the next get together at our home before they leave. However, there are times after everyone is gone and I am cleaning up in the quiet that I think about what I missed. The conversations that I only floated in and out of, the games I started to play but then got distracted from finishing, the precious moments that I let get away by not stopping and truly listening to the ones I love.

God blesses us with people in our lives to love and who love us. Help me to put aside my perfectionist tendencies and to choose the better part.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, slow me down enough to hear your guiding word and to enjoy all the special people you have placed in my life.

— Pat Boyd

March 5

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?

Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.

The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles.

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.

— Psalm 34:11-18

Knowing God and following His desire for us to "do good" will bring us to the deepest of joys and the goodness of life. Turning away from the things we do wrong means seeking a peace with God and others. And yet, we will face hardship, meanness, injustice - the difficulties that life throws at us. Those events will be withstood better if we stay connected to God. God will help us, strengthen us, and enable us to experience joy in the midst of pain.

Along with other Westminster Church members we have met with members of Grace Presbyterian Church and studied books which describe the sorrow of these African American friends who live with the sting of injustice and racial prejudice in their daily lives. Members of Grace Church, though hurt by these behaviors from others, speak of the love that they experience from God, a love which gives them strength to not be bitter and to have joy even as they work to address the racism that they face. They remind us to seek God's Spirit, do good, and receive his deliverance when the troubles of life overwhelm us.

PRAYER:

Oh Lord, our hearts break when we see injustice done and pain experienced. We seek your will, and we want to do good, so that we may be counted among the righteous. Grant us the promised presence of your Spirit. Amen.

— Barbara and Hetz Marsh

March 6

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

—Isaiah 56:6-7

What do you suppose God's vision of family looks like? These few verses paint a picture of God's house, which has opened its doors to all who worship The Lord. I don't know about you and your house, but God seems to be a lot more open to visitors than me. It makes me think of God's house as one in which all who enter are family, sharing in the common bond of community through grace, forgiveness and salvation. I wonder who we would bump into in that house.

How can we open our arms to others the way that God opens His home to us?

PRAYER:

Gracious God, you have opened the doors to your home so that we can enter freely. Allow me to open my arms to those around me this day. Amen.

—Ed Sutter

March 7

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

—Exodus 20:8-12

Reading this passage made me think about how hectic our lives are and how busy we get, pushing devotional or prayer time to the back burner, getting to it after everything else and if we have time. Sunday, especially, has lost the special feeling of it being God's day and a time to "rest" and appreciate our blessings. We need to make time to realize that we are blessed and to thank God who has provided us with these blessings. I am thankful for my family, my children and grandchildren, and the blessing of getting another grandbaby. And I am blessed to have Westminster as such a big part of my life. It has provided joy, learning, comfort, and solace for many years.

During this Lenten season, it is good to think about our blessings and all that God has provided us with. It is good to take time from our super busy schedules to set aside quiet periods to remember the good things and how God has celebrated with us and the sad times when he has provided much needed comfort. God was also super busy for 6 days, creating all we have, and then rested on the seventh. Perhaps that is something we should think about, making that seventh day God's day for us.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help me to never forget how blessed I am and how all that I have comes from you. Help me to put aside special time for thought and prayer, acknowledging blessings and giving thanks. In the blessed Savior's name. Amen.

—Karen Williams

Sunday, March 8

Scripture:

Exodus 16:21-30
Matthew 6:25-33

Meditation:

If you listen,
Listen.
If you listen you will hear
Sabbath descend from her distant place,
Gently clearing the air
Of the steady buzz of the mundane,
Gently inviting you to stillness,
Gently preparing the space
For the arrival of holiness.
If you listen,
Listen.
If you listen you will hear
The arrival of luminous wonder,
A radiance of glory that touches your heart,
So that love pulses through your veins.
The gates of your soul burst open,
You run through them, skipping, singing.

(adapted from "Come, Beloved" by Alden Solovy in This Grateful Heart, 2017)

PRAYER:

**O God, in a moment of silence I sit before you,
May this Sabbath whisper those things which offer
healing and hope. Amen.**

March 9

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together.

To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.

Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."

For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you."

For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

— Psalm 122:1-9

Through the storms of life seek God to show you peace. Start by choosing thoughts that are positive, kind and loving and reject those that are negative. Those thoughts become words then actions and then you will see God transform your life.

Every challenge, invite God in and experience a transformation from something dark to something beautiful.

PRAYER:

God I am grateful that you will guide me during storms of life to transform my thoughts and actions so I will find peace during a dark time.

— Cindy Luck



March 10

I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I am coming to you." If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way.

— John 14:25-31

"The Peace of Christ be with you." This blessing is passed on from person to person in worship services in many churches. I never understood why this was part of the service until really paying attention to John 14.

After sharing the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus is preparing them, giving instructions on how to cope with the events to come. He knows the worry, anxiety, fear and anguish that will be experienced in the days to follow; arrest, trial, beatings, crucifixion, death and burial. Jesus is giving the gift of His Peace – the love of God, hope of redemption and resurrection.

It is also not a peace experienced in the world but an inner peace that may not be understood but is felt deeply when there is faith that God is near and will never leave you alone. People may seek a sense of peace by avoiding the struggles, ignoring the anxiety or pain, denying the grief. Too often peace is sought through substance abuse, and addictive behaviors that temporarily give a sense of relief.

The peace Jesus gives is a gift of comfort, hope and assurance that we do not suffer alone. Whatever is happening in life, the Peace of Christ is given to you.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, thank you for the everlasting gift of Your Peace. When I face the difficult challenges in life and anxiety and fear begin to take hold, help me to accept your gift. May I always open my heart and mind to receive your Peace. Amen.

— Barbara Myers

March 11

Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me!

Take hold of shield and buckler, and rise up to help me!

Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers; say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life. Let them be turned back and confounded who devise evil against me.

Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them on.

Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my life.

Let ruin come on them unawares. And let the net that they hid ensnare them; let them fall in it—to their ruin.

Then my soul shall rejoice in the LORD, exulting in his deliverance.

— Psalm 35:1-9

I'll be honest, I chose this passage and date randomly, and as I sat down to write this devotion, I thought about running back for another passage. I am a 9 on the enneagram, which if you've studied at all means that I am almost allergic to conflict. I want to be a peacemaker above almost all else, and so a psalm that encourages God to fight with who I'm fighting with feels foreign. A psalm that prays that God would allow others to be put to shame feels wrong. I'd like a refund.

And yet our lives are full of tension, aren't they? For as much as we'd like peace at all times, we find a bunch of little wars. For as much as we'd love for everything to wrap up at the end of the episode, our lives are not little sitcoms. We are meant to wrestle, to struggle, to push through. And in these struggles this psalm reminds us well, that we rejoice in the Lord, exulting in his deliverance. It is God that makes sense of the tension in life. It is God that protects. It is God who saves. Let us rejoice and exalt in that deliverance!

PRAYER:

Dear God, when I feel that the world is against me and others are, either by their indifference or hostility, impediments in my way, grant that I may not sink into the quicksand of self-pity, but rather call out vigorously to you to be my Savior, in Jesus' name. Amen.

(Eugene H. Peterson, Praying With the Psalms. Harper Collins. 1993.)

— Jason Freyer

March 12

At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

— *Matthew 11:25-30*

This passage was moving to me personally, and perhaps for many others, who may be experiencing an increase in anxiety in recent years. Many of us feel burdened by factors beyond our immediate control – our country's politics and the breakdown of civility, decency and compassion in public life; the threat of climate change; health concerns or financial burdens; and even our own church's crisis—all in an increasingly fast-paced, over-stimulated world.

We may turn to things the experts suggest: eat healthier, exercise more, get more sleep and find ways to cope with our feelings. While these strategies may provide some benefits, this passage reminds us that meanwhile, God is extending an open invitation to ALL of us. He invites us to be humble enough to not "do" anything – but simply go to him, open our hearts, and allow God in. No matter the number of burdens, the amount of shame or guilt, God will find room in our hearts and provide the comfort and love only God can provide. Through his power and grace he will share our load and lighten our burden if we can find the humility to truly let God in.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of your invitation to come to you for comfort and rest when burdens weigh too heavily. Like a parent snuggling a child to provide comfort, thank you for providing a place for peace when I am stressed or weary. Help me to be humble enough to not just seek out my own methods, but to truly open my heart and to sit with you in peace. It is in those moments of your gentleness that I may learn from you and find comfort in my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

— *Kristin LeBeau*

March 13

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

— *Deuteronomy 5:12-15*

It's hard, isn't it? And I'm not talking about getting out of bed to go to church on Sunday mornings! I'm talking about putting aside all the busyness and setting aside all the things we never got to during the week so that we can focus solely on the sabbath and keeping it holy as God commanded. Moses writes in Deuteronomy that God said to "Observe the sabbath day," and in Exodus to "Remember the sabbath day." Either way, we're called to action.

For me, one way to observe and remember the sabbath is to be in worship and fellowship with my church family on Sunday mornings. Ever since I was a little girl, worshipping at Westminster has been part of my Sunday ritual. So, I think I'm pretty good about that part of the scripture.

What I struggle with is the idea of just "resting" for the rest of the day, and not doing any work at all, especially when I see so much that needs done. It would be much easier if the Blue Laws that once kept stores closed on Sundays still existed, wouldn't it? Then we wouldn't have a choice. But they don't, and we do have choices. That said, I think there are ways to "rest" that may not seem like resting, but are ways to glorify God.

PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for loving us enough to give us the gift of Sabbath. Help us to stop and rest in You. Amen.

— *Beth Ketterman*

March 14

And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

— Matthew 8:23-27

That must have been a doozy of a storm on the Sea of Galilee! The winds blew fiercely, waves were crashing over the sides of the boat leading the experienced fishermen to cry out in fear for their lives. On the Sea of Galilee, storms blow up quickly; the waters can look placid and calm one minute and suddenly the winds whip up with little, if any warning. A thunderstorm can quickly overtake a small vessel. As they tried to navigate in their storm, the disciples saw that Jesus slept soundly.

Unexpected storms spring up in our lives from all kinds of places. Suddenly we find ourselves dealing with a death, financial set back, an accident or sad news from a friend. The storms of life are not caused by God. Rather Jesus is with us in the storms of life providing comfort, assurance, hope and healing. Jesus brings divine power that comes from God. The next time we find ourselves in a thunder storm or a storm in life, stop, pray to Jesus whose powerful presence is with us in all moments of life.

PRAYER:

Lord, you have been our help in ages past and you are our hope in years to come. Thank you for walking with us in the days of bright blue skies and in the times of stormy weather. Amen.

— Louise Rogers

Sunday, March 15

Scripture:

Psalm 23
Genesis 1:31-2:3

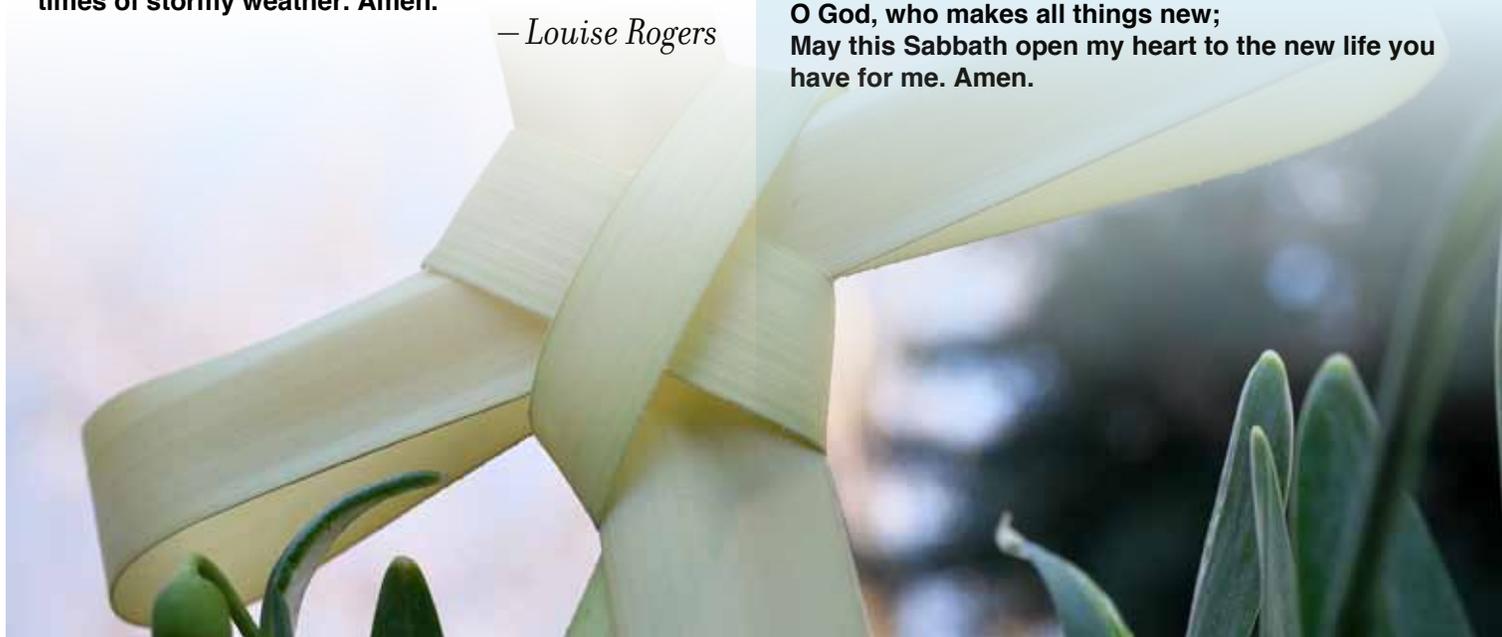
Meditation:

Majestic Sovereign,
Well of blessings,
How did You decide
To create heaven and earth?
Was this Your purpose:
To make a world of work,
For us to toil in service?
Did you bring forth a day of rest
As a gift to Your Creation?
Or was this Your only option,
After first conceiving
The glory of Sabbath?
Was the Sabbath itself
Your only intention?
Perhaps You summoned
Time and space
Solely to bring forth
The magnificent splendor
Of Sabbath.

(adapted from "About Shabbat" by Alden Solovy in [This Grateful Heart](#), 2017)

PRAYER:

**O God, who makes all things new;
May this Sabbath open my heart to the new life you
have for me. Amen.**



March 16

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

— Deuteronomy 6:4-9

This scripture helps me to define and develop my relationship with God. It tells me who He is, the One True God, and then it tells me how I can belong to Him. Loving, praising and worshipping God with all my heart is the reason I am here, and the only route to knowing Him. God wants my heart, and in the commandments, He tells me how I can give Him my heart. If I want to have a seeking, growing, firm and infinite relationship with Him, then I need to continually focus my thoughts and actions on my relationship with Him, through following His Word.

This scripture describes to me how the composition of a loving relationship with Him is grown every day through how I listen to Him, and more specifically how I obey His Will. He makes obedience very clear, simple and straightforward for me in the commandments and throughout His Word. Verses 5-9 underline and stress just how continuous, heartfelt and comprehensive He wants my efforts to be. God is Love, so learning love from Him is elementary. His Spirit is teaching me every day.

PRAYER:

Gracious and Loving Lord, Thank you for teaching me how to follow You, through Your Spirit, Your Word and through all those You have placed in my life. Amen.

— Jill Dietrich

March 17

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

— Matthew 7:7-11

As a guide to pray, Jesus instructs us to ask, search, knock (the first letter of each word forming the word ASK). When troubles come our way, we often find ourselves in a waiting pattern, hoping for relief from our struggles. Through this verse, God gives us a promise and a path to follow in prayer.

Sometimes when we ask for guidance in prayer, God gives us a quick answer or revelation. Ask and it is given. However, when the answer doesn't meet our expectations or timeframe, we may become frustrated and need to search for more. Searching our heart may find the answer that we seek. But what if the answer is unexpected or difficult? Finally, in some cases, we must knock. Why, God, are you not answering me in the way I expect? Why is this happening? Can you hear me God? I am knocking!

Jesus promises us that the door will always open and God will always answer. He will not leave you in your struggle. You can ask and receive his love; search and find his compassion and forgiveness; and knock to be welcomed into His grace.

God is waiting. He is there. Ask, search, knock.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, help me to know that you are there, that you wait in grace for me to approach you in prayer. Bestow upon me your will when I ask, guide me along the right path when I search for answers and embrace me in your loving arms when I finally arrive to knock on your door, giving me all good things. Thank you for your everlasting love. Amen.

— Becky Weber

March 18

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

—Romans 14:1-6

There are so many times in my professional and personal life, I run into people with different beliefs than my own. It may be medical, personal or political. I try very hard to approach these differences with a positive, non-judgmental attitude. This sometimes is very difficult, but I believe everyone is entitled to their opinion and should be allowed to voice that opinion or belief without being bullied, embarrassed or ridiculed. I unfortunately observe so many times this is not how differences are handled. I believe if you haven't walked in someone else's shoes, it is very hard to pass judgment on their beliefs.

Attitudes are so important. Many of us, however, have never learned to have positive attitudes towards others who differ in our beliefs. God welcomes all, despite beliefs or actions. He will be there to pass judgment; it's not our job to do that. We should not push people away, bully or criticize because of differences. God wants us to honor all in his name and give thanks. We need to treat all with grace and kindness.

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, please give me the strength to open my mind to the differences of others. Help me to understand and accept these people for their beliefs and opinions. May I honor you by treating others with grace and kindness. Amen.

—Karen Gannon

March 19

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

—John 3:17-21

I cannot help but think about parenting when I read scripture. The imagery and relationships are clear. A parent seeking to help children do what is right. A parent willing to sacrifice. Children rebelling. It is also striking, that in this relationship, there is a child, Jesus, who is perfect.

No matter how many times it is reframed for me, I often feel myself judged, no longer by the church as I was in my youth, but often times by myself or by my perceptions from others. The beginning of today's passage reminds me that is by no means God's goal. God "sent the Son into the world...in order that the world might be saved." It is our opportunity to accept this gift and our responsibility to act upon it.

As a parent, I try to remind my children that it is important to acknowledge when we do something wrong. It is also important to change our actions so we do not repeat our mistakes. I need to remember that, although I am a parent, I am also a child. Not only to my parents, but to God. And I need to consistently seek forgiveness and commit to changing my ways. And I need to remember that children can be perfect. Not their choices. But their spirit.

PRAYER:

Good and gracious God, please help me to remember to see the grace that you have given me. Help me to offer it to others, and to work each day to learn from my mistakes. I cannot be worthy of your grace, so help me to accept it and respond.

—Pat McClintock-Comeaux

March 20

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

—Ephesians 3:14-19

This scripture spoke to my heart because of the many powerful words and phrases Paul shares in his letter to the Ephesians. The first part of this prayer is to be strengthened with power that only our Lord can provide through the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we bow to our knees literally or figuratively, we are humbling ourselves before God by giving Him the power over our lives. We are relinquishing our control and asking our Lord to direct our path and walk alongside us in all that we do. The day I was ordained as a Deacon, I felt this humbling experience of God letting me know I was right where he wanted me to be and how much love he has for me. It was time for me to share his love with others. The love our Lord has for each one of us is immeasurable. We pray this day to open out hearts to God's infinite love for us.

My prayer is for us to grow spiritually and open our hearts and souls to be filled with God's love so that love will shine through us. Our Heavenly Father, desires to have a personal relationship with us. All we have to do is call unto him and ask Him to dwell in our hearts.

PRAYER:

My prayer for myself and all the Westminster family is that we will experience Christ's fullness of love and joy during this Lenten season. I pray that we will be filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit and that we will recognize all that God is doing through us and for us.

—Natalie Brown

March 21

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

—Psalm 85:8-13

Not long ago (somewhat surprisingly) my son-in-law asked me, "Do you have a favorite word and if so, what is it?" Even more surprising to me was that I had an immediate answer. I have always loved the word *SANCTUARY*. I love every aspect of it because it carries multiple meanings for me - a sacred, holy and hallowed place, a confessional place to pray, a house of worship, and God's home. It also guides me to thinking about protection, refuge, solemnity, comfort, safety, oasis and inner joy. I love the word *Sanctuary*.

After having read and reread Psalm 85, I have discovered another meaning of my favorite word. The Psalmist poetically writes about a time that is coming "when love and faithfulness will join together and when righteousness and peace will kiss." This scriptural image leads me toward seeing *Sanctuary* in a new and deeper way. As Lent is a time of preparation and spiritual reflection, perhaps you will join me in reflecting on this meaning of sanctuary...when love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace come together in celebration of a glorious world to come as promised by God our Father.

PRAYER:

Lord I pray, during this Lenten season, please gift us with the kind of sanctuary that brings our hearts and minds closer to love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace. Amen.

—Sandy Conaway

Sunday, March 22

Scripture:

Meditation:

Sabbath settles on Jerusalem
 Like a dove,
 Gliding on silent wings.
 Sabbath settles in my heart,
 A lover with open arms,
 Embracing my soul with song,
 Wrapped in quiet breathing.
 I send blessings into the world.
 Light.
 Bread.
 Prayers of peace

(adapted from "Shabbat Settles on Jerusalem" by Alden Solovy in This Grateful Heart, 2017)

PRAYER:

O God, you give a peace that passes all understanding;

May this Sabbath be a time to grow in wisdom and prayer. Amen.

March 23

When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, take care that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

— *Deuteronomy 6:10-12*

I decided to be part of this project right before vacation, figuring I might consider the questions during some free time. The free time never came, but the scripture passage never really left me. Our vacation included a lovely cruise, a real luxury. However, I kept hearing in my mind the passage that says you enjoy “large, fine cities that you did not build, houses with all sorts of goods that you did not fill...vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant”. We did indeed enjoy these things, but there were many people who served us, who built the ship and cooked the dinners and grew the grapes for the wine and made our bed and washed the dishes, who did not get to enjoy the benefits. This is such a contrast to the new creation described in Isaiah 65:21, which says “they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit...” I think the Deuteronomy passage calls us to recognize that sometimes our enjoyment comes at a cost to others, while the Isaiah passage shows us the new creation where we work to ensure that people enjoy the benefits of their own labors.

PRAYER:

God of us all, Open my heart to the needs and lives of others. Give me energy and courage to work for justice for all your children. Teach us to become family, particularly with those who have less. I pray this in the name of Jesus, who is at the center of our longing for justice. Amen.

— *Bobbie Hartman*



March 24

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

— Matthew 6:19-21

We all know what our faith tells us about service... Love our neighbor, what you've done for the least of these you've done for me, and where your heart is there your treasure will be. God's message to us about serving others is clear or as Rev. Bruce Lancaster reminded us, these are not complicated instructions.

Westminster serves the lives of more than 10,000 people outside our walls... in City Mission, SHIM, Haiti, India, Homewood, etc. These are just the people Jesus tells us to serve... the poor, the meek, the hungry, and the persecuted.

It can be hard, living in comfort, to be involved with the lives of the people Jesus is telling us to serve. And that's why Westminster's outreach and volunteering exist, because they enable us to do what Jesus tells us to do.

It's often said that joyful givers receive more than those they give to. My involvement in Homewood over the last 10 years has totally changed my life, and it has brought far more joy to my life than I ever knew was possible. Bruce said, "our heart and treasure are always connected." I pray that all may find a way to participate in serving the least of these and experience the same joy of giving I've discovered.

PRAYER:

Lord, remind us, it is always better to give than to receive. Amen.

— Dan Paul

March 25

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. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

— Isaiah 55:6-11

We read in Isaiah 55 "Seek the Lord while he may be found... for he will abundantly pardon... For as the rain and snow come down from heaven... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it." What a powerful description of God's mercy and grace. As we sense the ultimate gift given to us through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we're motivated to re-dedicate our lives as a living prayer.

So often in our daily being, we feel alone, wanting comfort and assurance that our Lord is near. The great and profound power of God's forgiveness is that when we're tempted to follow a path away from God, His presence, His nearness, His abundant pardon will draw us back to righteous living.

PRAYER:

Dear God, as a fallen people, we seek your presence in our lives so that we no longer feel abandoned and alone. With your strength, we push sin aside and our being is filled with your holiness. Our prayer then becomes one of sharing your love in communion with others, that our lives may be a living prayer to you. In your precious Son Jesus' name, Amen.

— Paul and Sandy Conley

March 26

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;

for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth;

they shall be given over to the power of the sword, they shall be prey for jackals.

But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

— *Psalms 63:1-11*

This psalm resonated with me as a young lawyer in the courts of Western Pennsylvania facing the perils of legal fights. I felt the strengthening effect of the psalm, as King David must have felt it while facing his foes. I needed a God like the one in this Psalm to help me in the trenches. This God is different from the God I experienced later, when I was 57, and had a mystical experience. The difference, of course wasn't in God but in my perception of God.

In the years following that experience I have learned that to experience God gives a great freedom of mind and soul, and this God is absolutely free of any definition or description except absolute Love. People who experience God are not alone because they experience an unchangeable oneness with God. This experience allows trust in God and freedom from fear, worry or anxiety. They know peace. They can laugh.

Experiencing God makes a person want to live fully in this world as a channel of God's love. Being one with God makes one aware that everyone else is also one with God, and that we are here together to learn to love one another.

PRAYER:

In this quiet moment, may I open my heart and mind, the center where God is. May I remember God in the giving and receiving of love, which are two inseparable parts of the same experience.

— *John Hayes*

March 27

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

— *Philippians 2:1-4*

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians encouraging them to "be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." As I read this, I felt how this was a timely message for all of us and our church as we faced and worked through the difficulties of this last year brought on by the betrayal that we all felt. I appreciated how the spirit of unity that we felt and embraced has brought us through the last year and positioned the church for the future.

In our recent session retreat we asked ourselves how we would describe our church and the word cloud we drew emphasized the word LOVE. In this scripture Paul spoke of "doing nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, regard others as better than ourselves." For me this is a defining part of our church; as we described ourselves as being a church with a mission of love, actively reaching out in mission to work for "the interests of others."

My son, an ardent Catholic, recently gave me a book that wrote of the offering of merciful love of Saint Therese of Lisieux. Her teachings inspire us to recognize our lowliness and sinfulness (humility), to be merciful and compassionate (look to the interest of others) and to open ourselves to God's merciful love.

PRAYER:

Lord, thank you for the unity of our church as we navigated the difficulties we faced this past year. Let us continue to grow as a church, continue to grow in our mission to serve others and to grow spiritually to fully embrace the great love you have for us. Amen.

— *David Heilman*

March 28

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

— Habakkuk 3:17-19

Habakkuk is a prophet in 612 B.C., during a time of injustice and corruption, with life being difficult and the land bleak. Habakkuk put his trust, faith and loyalty in God, which kept him strong, triumphant and perhaps even happy. To be fortunate is a matter of opinion or degree. To be fortunate is to have faith in a higher power, to have trust in God. For “In God We Trust”. Some people count themselves as either fortunate or unfortunate...but should it matter? With faith in God are we all not fortunate? Should we all not rejoice as our faith gives us strength to deal with life’s ups and downs, fortune and misfortune? An individual’s faith should not waiver when things do not go the way one wants but instead lead one to be grateful for all that one does have...be it health, family or friends. God provides if we just believe and have faith. As the lyrics go...“You can’t always get what you want but if you try sometime (and pray sometime), you might find, you’ll get what you need.”

PRAYER:

Lord, help me remember to be grateful for all that I have... health, family and friends. And when life isn’t going my way, help strengthen my faith in You who provides what I need. Amen.

— Dave Palko

Sunday, March 29

Scripture:

Psalm 34:1-10
Philippians 4:4-9

Meditation:

Sabbath is the place
Where time and space meet,
Without questioning
How the beginning began
Or how the ending ends.
Sabbath is the place
Where song and silence meet,
Blessing each other
With the gift of rest.
Sabbath is the place
Where dreams and angels meet,
Yearning together
For a world of peace.
Sabbath is a place
Where holiness and eternity meet,
Praying together
For the world-to-come.

(adapted from “Shabbat Is the Place” by Alden Solovy in This Grateful Heart, 2017)

PRAYER:

**O God, you are near, very near, and have shown yourself to me in so many ways;
May this Sabbath expand my joy and gratitude for your presence. Amen.**



March 30

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

— *Isaiah 25:6-9*

How long they waited for the Messiah, the anointed one. Isaiah wrote of the one who will come to live among God's people and cast God's power on the earth. Death will be destroyed forever as the promise of eternal life is realized. And in heaven the Lord God will wipe away every tear from their faces, a nod to the prophecy found in Revelation.

The Messiah is Jesus Christ! He did not come in the expected way as a military leader, or a political leader or even a religious leader of the day. Rather he came as God's beloved Son to show us how to live in the right way for God. Yes, the long wait is over and we are saved through the One who loves us so much he was even faithful to die on the cross for our sake.

This good news is not just for us but for all of the nations of the earth. We can trust in the Lord who knows us, claims us and loves in the name of Jesus the Christ, the Messiah.

PRAYER:

Thank you God for the blessings of our lives, the pleasure of good food, the joy of friends and most of all, the gift of your son Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

— *Louise Rogers*

March 31

If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

— *Isaiah 58:13-14*

Most of us would probably agree that being busy is a good thing, an admirable quality. Having a robust 'to-do' list is a sure sign of an accomplished, successful person, is it not?

Recently I heard this quote: "If the devil can't make you bad, he will make you busy." Ours is a very fast-paced, stressful world, 24/7 access to shopping, emails, text messages and social media is truly relentless.

But, God who in six days created the heavens, and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them; He too rested on the seventh day. The Lord blessed it and commanded us as His followers to honor the Sabbath. By worshipping in church and spending time in togetherness with family and friends, abstaining from work and labor, and, might I add "our in-boxes" we can rest in Him and let His blessings and grace renew and refresh our souls.

By keeping the true meaning of the Sabbath, to quote Isaiah 58:14 "we can delight in the Lord". It is also a gentle reminder that for one day out of seven, *we relinquish control* into God's hands.

PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father, I praise your Holy Name and thank you for your grace and blessing to keep your commandment to honor the Sabbath, the day you deemed as holy that I may find true rest and renewal that I may experience Your delight.

— *Cathy Kramer*

April 1

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad.

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.

The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

— Psalm 34:1-10

I often find myself in a place where I need to make a decision but I am not sure which way to turn. Sometimes I will make two lists, pro or con, to help in my decision, or I will talk it over with a close friend. Psalm 34:1-10 reassures me that when I pray to God to help me to decide He is always there waiting for me.

I need to be reminded that I must trust that God is ready and waiting.

It is amazing to image that God Almighty is waiting for me. To know God that well makes me thankful for those who influenced my Christian Faith. I am most thankful for my dear mother who would quote scripture for most daily happenings.

PRAYER:

Loving God, thank you for always being present when I pray to you. Yes, I am happy when I take refuge in you! Amen.

— Helen Watson

April 2

But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath."

— Matthew 12:7-8

I'm always interested in what Jesus chooses to quote. Here it's Hosea 6:6, and He also quotes it in Matthew 9:13. Why would Jesus repeat that mercy is preferred to sacrifice? Both seem like good practices. Sacrifice for me, has generally been about money – something we talk about in annual "stewardship" discussions. We've thought about it annually in weighing our commitment.

As I've learned to be retired, I've found that we've traded income for time – discretionary time. Even though I tend to be shy, I've been able to invest more time in relationships. In thinking about the difference between sacrifice and mercy, it occurred to me that I've made sacrifices without much attention to relationship building. Mercy seems different; I think it requires a relationship. It reflects Jesus' priorities; people come first, individuals in relationship. Mercy follows.

The truth is I depend on God's grace and mercy so regularly that I tend to slip into taking it for granted.

PRAYER:

Father, Son, Spirit, help me be mindful of the extravagant grace You lavish on me every day, and help me reflect that in my willingness to show mercy and grace to others. Teach me to pause and find mental sabbath during my day – time to reflect on Your mercy.

— Bob Dilly

April 3

One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath."

— Mark 2:23-27

I cannot imagine needing something to eat and not being able to lawfully eat available food. The Pharisees had burdened the Jews with many regulations about the sabbath observance and priestly rights.

Edges of fields were not to be harvested in order for travelers to pick some of the crops for sustenance. The law was written with a provision for needy people to have food. Farmers were not to harvest on the sabbath in order to curb greediness and to promote worship. Not harvesting on God's day also benefited the workers; they had a day of rest.

The consecrated bread that David and his men ate was meant for the priests. Every Sabbath when the priests placed 12 loaves of bread in the Holy Place, they ate the old ones. Obviously there was always bread available and enough to share.

God planned the sabbath for mankind to have a time of spiritual, mental and physical restoration. God would not want someone to go hungry on a day that was meant for worship and gratitude. It is hard to focus on God's goodness with an empty stomach! God desires us to show love and mercy by caring for each other; that means, in part, sharing food with those in need at any time.

PRAYER:

Holy and gracious God, thank you for the provision of a sabbath day on which to worship and reflect on your goodness and grace. Enable me to become aware of those in need and show me ways to care for them, whenever and wherever. In Jesus name, Amen.

— Sue Davis

April 4

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

— Acts 2:43-47

Yes

You are the God who is simple, direct, clear with us and for us.

You have committed yourself to us.

You have said yes to us in creation,

Yes to us in our birth

Yes to us in our baptism,

Yes to us in our awakening this day.

But we are aware of another kind,

more accustomed to "perhaps, maybe, we'll see,"
left in wonderment and ambiguity.

We live our lives not back to your yes,

But our of our endless "perhaps."

So we pray for your mercy this day that we may live Yes
back to you,

Yes with our time,

Yes with our money

Yes with our sexuality

Yes with our strength and with our weakness,

Yes with our neighbor,

Yes and no longer "perhaps."

In the name of your enfleshed Yes to us,

Even Jesus who is our Yes into your future, Amen

(Walter Brueggemann, *Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth*, 91)

Palm Sunday, April 5

Scripture:

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Matthew 21:1-11

Meditation:

I know how it must have been for those people long ago

who rejoiced when Jesus came to their city and cried "Hosanna!"

I know how their hearts swelled with good will and how happily they threw their hats in the air.

I know, too, when I look within, how the good will faded,

and the rancorous ill will grew into the cry, "Crucify him!"

For I, too, am capable of swinging from praise to denial, from singing to cursing.

I am not always steady and sure in what I want, in my loves and loyalties.

O Lord, I wish you did not have to haul me back so often from my erring ways.

But I am grateful that you do, and that your love is as persistent as it is.

Since you refuse to give up on me, help me to refuse to give up on myself.

(adapted from "On Palm Sunday" by Kenneth G. Phifer in A Book of Uncommon Prayer, 1981)

PRAYER:

O God, Jesus entered the city with humility and courage;

May this Sabbath welcome his coming into my life. Amen.

April 6

Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers."

— Luke 19:45-46

God's house can be used for wrong intentions. Our own House of Prayer has faced challenging times recently which is an unfortunate example of what can happen sometimes.

It reminds me that we must be on guard in our own lives so that we don't become victims of these potential robbers. There are other examples in the Bible where God has stepped in to resolve some things that had gotten out of hand. Here He did this through his Son and then had it detailed in the Bible so we don't forget.

It made me realize how lucky I have been in my life to have God's help to manage or avoid bad decisions in my business and personal life. And actually, we all have had His benefit if we would just realize it. We must each thank Him for it. God has set standards for us to live by. If we don't, he will do what must be done to maintain those standards. Let us pray he doesn't have to.

PRAYER:

Thank you God for your Son and Your Word. May You continue to be the guardian and guide in choices I make today and for tomorrow. Amen.

— Bob Sheap



April 7

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

—John 12:24-25

I am a fan of Doctor Who from the popular British science-fiction television program. The Doctor is a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey. The Doctor helps those under siege from evil aliens whose aim is to destroy the universe one planet at a time. He doesn't have superhuman strength or conventional weapons and he avoids violence. He does this with human companions, a time machine that looks like a police box and his sonic screwdriver. On several occasions he has been mortally wounded when trying to save others. Fortunately, his species can heal his cell by a process of regeneration. Every cell is made new, making him look like an entirely new person with a somewhat different personality.

In our lives, we sometimes feel like we are being attacked on all sides by alien forces. We can't regenerate our bodies, but we can renew ourselves by observing sabbath. By resting and reconnecting with God, we are better able deal with life's difficulties and appreciate all the blessings that we have been given.

Prayer:

I pray to find peace and renewal from the Sabbath experience.

—Harriet Dilly

April 8

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers." The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself'?" He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

—Matthew 21:12-17

Jesus generally evokes a feeling of love, warmth and forgiveness. However, as he entered the temple to find cheats and selfish acts of changing money, he became angry. He overturned tables and seats but never physically harmed the money changers. It seemed out of character until we consider his words "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers." After Jesus cleansed the temple of the robbers and put an end to their selfish abuses, he proceeded to cure the blind and the lame who traveled to him in the temple. He loved and welcomed all those in need. Children began to cry out "Hosanna to the Son of David" which angered the chief priests in the temple who refused to acknowledge his holiness. Ignoring the chief priests, Jesus acknowledged and accepted the praise and presence of the little children. We learn from this passage that Jesus sees a temple as a place of holy and selfless worship, a welcome place for those suffering and in need to be healed, and a place that respects little children who praise his name.

PRAYER:

Dear God, may my heart serve as a temple where I selflessly worship your holiness, where I seek and welcome those in need and comfort them, and where I acknowledge and respect all brothers and sisters, even the smallest among us. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

—Bonnie Bacik

April 9

He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

— Mark 14:37-38

What a wonderful gift that the Holy Spirit, who Jesus refers to as Counselor or Helper, lives in each of us! The question is...are we always led by this gift or do we fall prey to human nature? I know that I often let myself down by choosing the later. My vice is impatience. The "Spirit of truth" is constantly reminding me through that little voice in my head and my children's response to my actions that patience is the road to choose but sadly, I don't always listen. If not for prayer and the Holy Spirit, my level of impatience would go completely unchecked and I can only imagine the results. Fortunately, each time I pray and ask my Helper for support to keep me calm, I am gently nudged back on track. What is your vice? What do you need to pray about such that the Holy Spirit can help guide you in the right direction? "The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak." We can't do it alone. We are too weak without the support and guidance of our Counselor. We need to tap into the ever-present Holy Spirit through devotion and prayer to help us follow Christ's example.

PRAYER:

Dear God, Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide my thoughts and actions. I know human nature alone will fail me without your love and support to keep me on track. Help me to listen intently to the will of my Counselor to guide me away from my vice and toward your Glory. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

— Michele Burgess

April 10

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

— Mark 15:42-46

Pilate was a leader and politician, acquiescing to many loud vices yet protecting his position, shedding responsibility and taking qualified credit for his actions, diminishing his role as a good leader. He enabled others to resolve his lack of leadership.

We all confront leadership and a hierarchy of procedures in our lives. As Christians we are baptized, nurtured thru life in God's ways with Jesus as our example, and guided to repent for our sins seeking forgiveness, and the everlasting life.

Believe in love and the goodness of all mankind. Out of qualified decisions, darkness, sorrow and pain, a new day will rise for new opportunities and the joy of our risen Lord for all. Joseph had a task and responsibility, as we have a responsibility to preserve and extend God's love, and teachings leading by our deeds, loving our fellow mankind.

PRAYER:

Lord, each day help me to take responsibility for my actions and lead with good deeds, love and joy, being an example to my family, friends, community and the world. I am thankful for the opportunity each day to find fulfillment in Jesus Christ's resurrection to enrich life. Amen.

— Doug Shuck

April 11

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

— Revelation 21:1-5

With surprising clarity for a passage from Revelation we are shown what the fulfilment of God's promise for us looks like. The casting of all evil and sin into the sea had removed the separation between God and mankind. God with us, a perfect vision of love. This reminded me of the thin space experiences that I have had. All were relational. Blessings that can never be forgotten. I believe this is how God has designed us and why we were made. God among mortals, everything made new. The promise of life with God. Write this!

PRAYER:

Father I give thanks for your steadfast love in this broken world. I pray for contentment in what I receive daily from you and that I can be a better mirror of your love to others.

— Jay Galbreath

Easter Sunday, April 12



*He is
Risen*



Reflections

Labyrinths

Labyrinths are found in many cultures as far back as 3500 BC. Unlike a maze, the labyrinth is unicursal, having a single path leading to the center with no loops, cul-de-sacs or forks.

This labyrinth is a scale replica of an ancient labyrinth constructed around 1200 AD in the stone floor of Chartres Cathedral, France.

Medieval Christians visited Chartres (and other cathedrals) and walked the labyrinth as an alternative to taking a hazardous pilgrimage to Jerusalem to walk in the “footsteps of Christ.”

Modern “pilgrims” walk the path as one of many tools to enhance prayer, contemplation, meditation, and/or personal growth.



Walking a Labyrinth

There is not a “required way” to walk a labyrinth. The beauty of the labyrinth is that people can approach the experience on their own terms. However, as a guideline, we often break the “walk” into three stages.

Entering: (also referred to as shedding or purgation) During this stage you walk the path toward the center, and should “center yourself” by trying to put aside worldly concerns and quiet the mind.

Illumination: The time spent in the center. This is a time of openness and peacefulness; you experience, learn or receive what this unique moment offers. Take your time. Let your inner spirit determine when to leave the center.

Return: Take insight and peace into your life.

Westminster's Indoor Labyrinth

During Holy Week, beginning Palm Sunday, April 5, through Easter Sunday, April 12, the 36-foot canvas labyrinth will be available for meditative walking in Fellowship Hall during the times the church building is open.



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