Lenten Devotional

Reflections for each day in Lent



Introduction

As we embark on this sacred Lenten journey, I invite you to join in a period of deep reflection and spiritual growth under the theme "Rising from Ruin: Crafting our Communal Renaissance."

This Lent, we are called to explore the profound depths of ruin - not just the physical and historical ruins, but also the ruins of our own lives, our communities, and the world. These ruins, whether born of personal trials, societal injustices, or global challenges, often leave us feeling lost and desolate.

Yet, it is within these very ruins that we find the seeds of a new beginning, the potential for a profound transformation that can lead us toward a communal renaissance. We'll explore how the concept of a renaissance - a rebirth or revival - can manifest in our lives today, encouraging us to rise from our individual and collective ruins towards a future filled with hope, community, and grace.

These reflections from members of our congregation will guide us through this journey of introspection and renewal, helping us to uncover the beauty and hope that can emerge from the ashes. Together, we will discover how the ruins of our past can become the foundation for a vibrant and flourishing future, a true renaissance of spirit and community. I'm excited to journey with you this Lenten season.

Pastor Jeremy

Day 1 February 14 Matthew 6: 1-18 Cynthia Lockwood

When I read Jesus' instructions to "go into your room and shut the door" when praying, I initially thought about the times our parents punished us with, "Go to your room!"

But then, I realized this was not a reprimand. Jesus was inviting us into a quiet, personal time to reflect on our lives and our relationship with God. Our "room" could be any place where we spend time alone with God. So, where were my favorite "alone with God" places? I began to realize that, even though God had not been formally "invited" in, God's presentence had always been there.

It seems these sacred "rooms" have always been near water. My first memory was of the Willapa River in southwest Washington, a short jaunt across a cow pasture from my home that was my sanctuary during my turbulent teen years. When I lived in Seattle, I savored ferry rides across the sound on a gray, stormy day. Nothing like cold rain and wind to clear the cobwebs! Was this God's doing? Now I go to quiet, private places along the Skagit River or the Salish Sea.

I clutch my hot Americano or tea and quiet my mind. I realize that I hear God's voice in the geese or swans flying overhead, or in the wind rattling though the branches of the trees scattered along the bank.

Was God watching over me through the eyes of those bald eagles perched on a "talking" tree? Was that God's voice in the Skagit River flowing rapidly by, or in the Salish Sea as it hit the graveled, sandy shore. Now I realize I have been conversing with an old friend "in my room" all along.

Action: Find a favorite private quiet "room" and listen to your surroundings. Offer a prayer of thanks to the one who is listening with you.

Day 2 February 15 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 Jackie Celin

We need nothing other than the grace of God. Consider a time in your life when the grace of God carried you through a time of struggle.

I recall a time when I was on a church retreat at our wonderful Camp Indianola across the Puget Sound. I was feeling rather low at that point in my life, fully aware of my own inadequacies and imperfections. I took some time to wander along the shoreline of the water by myself. Eventually I found myself sitting on some rocks and looking out across the gray, overcast Seattle sky, singing some familiar hymns: "Amazing Grace" and "Be Thou My Vision." When I got to the final verse of the second hymn, I started singing, "Great God of heaven, my victory won, may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!" (UMH #451) Without warning, the clouds began to separate and I was bathed in the warm rays of the sun. In that moment, I could feel God's grace holding me. Sometimes, it is in our weakest moments that we can truly realize the fullness of God's grace.

Yes, God is our creator and sustainer, but God also redeems us from our imperfections through the divine gift that is God's grace. The grace of God is such a beautiful thing. May we learn to recognize its presence with us daily.

Prayer: Loving God, you are amazing! We give thanks and praise for your beautiful gift of grace provided to us before we even request it.

Action: Open up your hymnal to any hymn or search for a familiar hymn on YouTube. How do you see God's grace emphasized in its lyrics? How do you feel God's grace active in your own life?

Day 3
February 16
Violet Boyer
John 17:20-24

In the verses just before this passage, Jesus prayed for his disciples, whom he knew very well. In these verses, he prays for all of us, his future followers. How astonishing that Jesus prayed for you and for me! And what a powerful prayer!

Have you ever known someone was praying for you? How did that impact you as the receiver? Have you prayed for others? How did that change you as the giver?

As you may know, I recently lost my mother. She had a full life and died at 95 in the way she wanted, with minimal lingering and surrounded by her children. I know that many of you prayed for me, for her, and for my family as this was happening. I know you have continued to pray for us since her passing. I know this because you told me. I know this because I felt it! And I know this because praying moved you to action – a call, a text, an email, a card. Knowing that you were praying for me sustained me in the thick of her illness, and in the months since her death. Your prayers have become especially important to me as I find my new way of being in the world. Thank you for your prayers! They matter to me and to our beloved community.

Prayer: Gracious God, Help me to recognize Jesus' prayer for me, to embrace the prayers others offered for me, and to pause during the day to say a prayer for the people I encounter.

Action: Act on your prayer today. Write a postcard, send a text or an email, make a phone call. Be present with others.

Day 4
February 17
Tom Carlson
James 5:16

I think of the book of James as a pastoral letter about practicing an authentic Christian faith.

Let's consider the exhortation in this verse to confess our sins to one another as one example of James' instructions. We do this as a body in Sunday worship when we recite the Lord's Prayer, but I think that here James meant individual Christians confessing to one another.

It's hard, even scary, for me to own up to my faults - whether they are things I am ashamed of or how I have wronged or injured another person. Will my confession be accepted? Will it be held in confidence? Will forgiveness and reconciliation happen? Add to this that in life today, even in church opportunities, interaction can be limited to brief encounters in worship, the narthex, a class, at an event, or online. I am more likely to confess to a therapist than to fellow church members.

I have found confession more doable within the context of trusting, close relationships. These take time, sustained interaction, and diligence.

Years ago Dale, my spouse, and I were a part of a small church group that met weekly for a meal, study, and personal sharing. It was likely akin to some of the long-standing dinner groups at First Church. At first, interactions were casual, cautious, and guarded. But over several years trust developed to the point where there was sharing of fears, struggles and failures, as well as joys and successes. At times, it was arduous. There was conflict, tears, laughter, and yes, confessions and reconciliation.

The results were entirely worth the effort.

Prayer: Loving and forgiving God, help me develop trusting, loving, authentic relationships with others in all aspects of my life. Amen.

Day 5
February 19
Bruna Hygino
Acts 8:26-40

This passage about Philip meeting a stranger on the road made me think about how we interact with people, those we know well and those we meet casually. This awareness then causes me to ask several questions.

We are not alone in life, and we share our path with so many people. How many conversations have we had that ended up changing the course of our lives? How much of what we know and who we are today is the result of a conversation we didn't expect much of or didn't realize was truly significant at the time?

We all have at least one topic that we love to talk about. Whether it is our scientific research or favorite movie, we seize the opportunity and let our passion speak through our words. I agree with Jesus when he says that "the mouth speaks of what the heart is full of." In that sense, what is it that we have in our hearts that we're willing to share with the world?

We might worry about what to do, when sometimes, it is enough just to be. To be where we need to be – even if it means leaving our comfort zone or deviating a bit from our path.

To be open to listening and learning from others. To be there for someone who needs us. Are we ready to meet people where they are? And are we ready to help them, if needed, instead of judging them?

Prayer: Dear God, help us to be kind and truly see the people we meet along the way. May we leave our best with each person, wherever we go. Amen.

Day 6
February 20
Karen McOmber
Mark 1:9-15

A lot of action takes place in these few sentences. Jesus is baptized by John, praised by the Spirit, goes off into the wilderness, is tempted by Satan, protected by angels, and starts preaching in Galilee. Very few details are provided for moving us from one step to the next. Jesus must have felt such love to be called the "beloved son." But being confronted with dangerous situations in the wilderness for 40 days must have made him wonder why all this was happening. He avoided temptation and "passed the tests," perhaps because of that knowledge that he was much loved by his Father.

Later, as Jesus started preaching, he asked people to repent, believe what he says, and follow him. From the love Jesus felt at his baptism and from the presence of God with him in the desert, Jesus was ready to truly begin his ministry in the world.

We have times when we can share our love and knowledge with others who are suffering or in need. Then there are other times when we need those same gifts for ourselves.

Prayer: Help me to know that I am loved for who and what I am, to remember that God created me and that I am beautifully made.

Action: Think of a time when you experienced a significant challenge. Think about how you resolved it, and who or what helped you. Then offer a prayer for those that supported and loved you during your difficult time.

Day 7
February 21
Alex Smith

Acts 10: 9-16

Reading this passage, I struggled to find its significance. Then I remembered from long ago being awakened from a frightening dream of falling from a rooftop.

Although awake, I stayed in the dream, in a trance. The dream played out in slow motion. As I fell, time stretched and, knowing I was about to die, I became obsessed with the things I had not completed. Everything from trivial tasks to life-long projects, to unresolved issues with people. These spooled out faster and faster, each one like a music symbol, full of meaning, yet unique and strange. recognized each in a split-second, then said goodbye and let it go. Like shaking hands at a reception line, on to the next and the next until they were all done. Then I hit the ground and began to die.

The process was horrifying and painful but also transformative. I progressed from fear and shock and pain to letting go.

While this may sound dreadful, the dream was so powerful that I spent the entire rest of my waking day in blissful release – everything seemed vivid and bright. I recorded the dream in writing and have remembered it clearly to this day.

In Acts10 Simon Peter has his dream, which clarified that the gentiles were created by God, and therefore, they were not unclean. They were just as worthy of transformation as the Jews. Peter changed because of a message that came in a dream as a command that altered the trajectory of Christianity.

Action: Recall Peter's dream that is recounted in Acts and reflect on the enormity of the change that was being asked of him: to shift the focus of his ministry to people he had once thought beneath him and who were undeserving of his attention. Peter made the pivot. Can you?

Day 8
February 22
Julius Perez

Ephesians 6: 10-17

It is easy to think we can protect ourselves from trouble with our words and opinions and by "doing the right thing." But Paul says that God tells us that our armor is really faith, truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, and the spirit of God. This scares us because faith and peace don't feel like something you can clutch in your most daunting moments. Yet Paul says these are, in fact, the weapons we have for confronting evil.

Evil is real. It lurks in the darkest edges of life, and it appears right in front of us. Selfishness and corruption, disregard for our neighbor, unending war. Evil cannot be struck down with bullets. It will only become stronger through hate. Evil has poisoned minds and hearts for as long as we have stood on this earth, and it must be resisted and fought.

Victory over evil comes from relying on God's strength, on guarding salvation, and maintaining faith. The armor is the Word of God, truth, righteousness. and belief in the grace of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for your protection. In times filled with uncertainty and fear, remind us that the teachings of our Lord are more powerful than the reaches of evil, even in the darkest of moments. Amen.

Day 9
February 23
Anonymous
John 8:3-11

This story makes me both furious and giddy with pleasure! What do we know about the situation?

On one side we have:

Men, not just one, but several, as a group.

Men from the elite classes of scribes and Pharisees.

Specialists in the minutia of the law (not the "spirit of the law").

Schemers out to trick Jesus into breaking the law.

The male partner in the accused woman's crime. (Oh, my mistake. He's not there!)

One the other side:

One woman. All alone.

No social standing. No power.

Accused of a crime.

Forced to stand alone in public.

And finally, Jesus, who turned the tables on the accusers and offered sympathy and forgiveness to the woman. I'd love to know what Jesus wrote in the sand. Because then I could: send the same message to those who look at people of color without jobs and say, "Lazy. "use it against those who look at a young mother seeking help to feed her children and say, "Immoral." repeat it when I see churches label LGTBQIA persons as "not acceptable" in their community. scream it at those who put their "right" to carry a gun over the safety of me and my family.

Prayer: Holy One, this story reminds me of all the injustices I see every day. Give me holy anger to confront those in the wrong, holy compassion to stand with those in need, and holy energy to work for universal change. Amen.

Day 10
February 24
Bo Babarinsa
John 14: 1-4

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me." Jesus has shared with his disciples, the ones closest to him, that he will be betrayed and denied, and the disciples don't like what they hear. Jesus insists that this is the divine plan, that matters will unfold as God has shared with him. He insists that there is nothing to be troubled about. They will only be troubled if they do not have faith in God and Jesus, and by extension, faith in themselves.

Jesus trained the disciples to take on God's mission in his absence. The disciples' belief in God should have manifested into Jesus and then into themselves. Jesus is essentially telling them he is finished, that he has met his earthly purpose, that now he will take his place in his Father's home. The disciples are fully prepared to take the reins once Jesus passes, and their faith in God and Jesus and themselves will make it possible to complete God's divine plan.

I think each person should trust their intuition and believe in themselves because intuition is faith and trust that comes from God. Every person of faith has the skill, tools, and abilities to make it through the trials and obstacles of life and fulfill their earthly purpose.

Part of the trouble in the disciples' hearts was reconciling the peacefulness of Jesus with the news of his violent end. Jesus was telling the disciples to accept it because it is "God's plan." The disciples were about to lose the most profound person ever to grace Earth, and they are supposed to carry on and stay on mission. That rings true to our lives, as well. Many times we must carry on through very difficult times.

Action: Write down an event from each decade of your life when your intuition made a significant impact. Reflect on what you picked. Then remember that God was with you the whole time.

Day 11
February 26
Bruce Hall
Mark 10:17-22

What if I really gave away everything I had? Can you imagine?

I want to enjoy my life. I want to retire someday. I want to have a nice home. I want to eat everyday – and have some nicer meals now and then, too. Go on vacations. Watch Netflix.

This scripture is challenging for me. I feel I don't earn enough, especially in Seattle, to feel secure that I will have enough for my entire life. Yet... I am fairly confident – thanks to my education, my resources, my family, my friends and community – that I will likely always have a roof over my head and enough to eat. I realize that I am very lucky in this regard. In fact, I am rich!

How does one strike the right balance between enjoying what you work for, having a healthy life (that then enables you to be in a position to help the poor), and following what Jesus says to do here. Like that guy Jesus addresses in the scripture who went away sad because he had great wealth. I'm afraid that's me. Can you imagine really following this directive from Jesus? There are those in religious life who take a vow of poverty. I imagine there is something beautiful and freeing in that. Are you brave enough to try this level of generosity?

Action: Give to the poor today, either directly to an individual you encounter or to an organization that helps those in need.

Day 12 February 27 Jerry Robeson Revelation 22:1-5

The Book of Revelation has always felt very detached for me. Its other-worldly visions and prophecies seem like something not really meant for humankind to understand with much certainty, in contrast to other books of the Bible that meet us where we are today (or at least where we have been over past millennia). As a result, the Book of Revelation usually gets bypassed in the course of my normal Bible reading.

Yet, when I read today's scripture, something jumped out at me. "For the healing of the nations" is the one phrase in these five verses that has a contemporary sound to it. From ancient history through today, we observe (and exist within) nations that need healing. In our weekly "prayers of the people," we lift up nations in need of healing. In my own daily prayers, I ask God to bring healing to our own nation. We know that in future days there will continue to be nations in economic peril, nations at war, nations experiencing famine and poverty, and nations being overthrown by other nations, all in need of healing.

What is God, through the author, John, trying to convey here? Is it that, in God's ultimate eternity, nations are finally healed? Will nations continue to exist in that realm? Does our definition of "nation" match that of God and of this author? Or, quite simply, is a nation in need of healing simply a condition that has always been and will always be?

Prayer: Dear God, heal our nations. Rid them of war, famine, poverty, and hatred of one another.

Action: Read the Book of Revelation in a new way, searching for those instances where the other- worldliness of the book gives way to a moment of contemporary, earthbound reality.

Day 13 February 28 Don Crawley Revelation 21:1-5a

My view of God and God's relationship with the universe leans toward pantheism, a belief that God is the universe, and the universe, Earth, and nature are God. God is more than an anthropomorphized sentient being; God is an entity beyond human comprehension.

Instead of a literal understanding of this scripture, what if the concept of a new heaven and a new Earth is about re-making our relationship with God? God has always been with us. God is with us now. God will be with us in the new heaven and new Earth. The difference is that now, as we desecrate the Earth and our fellow humans through pollution, corruption, cruelty, war, ignorance, we also desecrate the Divine. We have chosen to distance ourselves from God. When we choose, instead, to honor our relationships with the Earth and all living things, we also honor our relationship with God. What if New Jerusalem is us, walking hand-in-hand with our Creator? Conversely, if we choose to distance ourselves from God on our path of self-destruction, God will continue with or without us.

Theologian Carla Aday commented, "God will cure cancer when we finish the research." The new heaven and Earth will appear when we stop the desecration.

"Making all things new" means that we put aside our vanity, arrogance, and carelessness in our relationship with God and instead honor God by loving, respecting, and honoring all living things and our world. That's acknowledging God is walking with us. That's the new heaven and new Earth.

Action: Identify one action you can take today, in addition to what you're already doing, to honor your fellow humans and all living things.

Day 14
February 29
Em Rigler
Matthew 15:22-28

The thing I'm struck by in this passage is the humanity of it all.

Jesus is rude, borderline cruel to the Canaanite woman. The disciples are upset, telling Jesus to send the woman away because she's been shouting at them. The woman is persistent, even in the face of what reads like a severe insult. She gets what she wants by ignoring slights and continuing to ask, for the sake of her daughter, which perhaps makes her the most human of all of them.

Time works strangely in Matthew's gospel. In the paragraph before, Jesus was arguing with the Pharisees about traditions and cleanliness, and then we're told he departed for the coastal region when the Canaanite woman appears. Maybe he's been walking for hours or days. Maybe the disciples are lost. Maybe it's hot. There could be so many reasons why Jesus reacts this way.

In reading this, I had an uncomfortable realization that I've been there. I have ignored people who were asking for help. I have failed to make eye contact when someone asks me directly for money, telling them I don't have any cash as I quickly walk past.

It's not the same, but the tune sounds so familiar. Maybe that's why this passage makes me wince when I read it.

Jesus is fully divine, but he's also fully human. He has bad days, a short temper, a sense of humor, and the capacity to love and care – all of it. And most importantly, at the end of this section, he realizes his mistake and he makes amends. What is more human than that?

Action: Take a moment to wonder about the people that you encounter today that you don't know. Remember their humanity. Give yourself grace if you can't help someone.

Day 15 March 1 Katherine Everett Psalm 137:1-4

"How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" In this passage, the Israelites are exiled in Babylon, which led me to think of the plight of refugees in our world today. I am reading The Beekeeper of Aleppo by Christy Lefteri, the fictional though realistic story of a family fleeing the wars in Syria. They have a long and treacherous journey through several countries. The father dreams of his bee hives and everything else left behind. The son was killed in a bombing and the mother is blinded by the shock.

There are so many refugees in our world today. The people we call immigrants, and even some of the non-immigrant homeless, are in a similar situation. Many people are struggling with depression and mental health issues. I know depression. It feels like you are far away from the peace and security and love of home.

Action: Look around you and see if there is someone who needs a touch of "home." How might you help them find it?

Prayer: Dear God, help us to really see these people who need "home." Give us the wisdom and drive to do something helpful. Amen

Day 16 March 2 Shawn Smith Psalms 146:7b-9

This Psalm says, "The Lord opens the eyes of the blind." How many times have we said to someone, "Watch where you're going! You're going to get into an accident!" The world is so full of distractions that sometimes we want to put on blinders to block them out so we can look straight ahead and concentrate on our goals.

This reminds me of blinders used on horses to help them stay on the path with out being distracted. Horses' retinas are different from ours. Their eyes have segmented areas for near and far vision. The far sighted area is positioned higher on their eyes to scan for potential dangers and threats such as lions or tigers. If they were to keep their blinders on, they could fall victim to these threats.

Many things serve as blinders for us: cell phones and social media, demands from work and family. If we spend too much time immersing ourselves in any of those distractions, our vision can become myopic.

We will fail to see the rising depression, homelessness, and drug abuse around us. We can fall prey to hidden dangers. We will not recognize the hundreds of hurting people in our city, and we can miss opportunities to help others. We will fail to grow spiritually.

God can use us to lift others up who have become "bowed down" or pushed down by society or circumstances. God is there for us even when no one else is. We can be there for others as well.

Action: Smile at a stranger, open doors for them, show kindness. You can make a difference in someone's life today.

Prayer: Lord open our eyes to the world around us. Make us bold in our efforts to help others.

Day 17
March 3
Gary Skinner
Acts 4:32-37

What is ours and what is not ours? What do we share and what do we keep for ourselves? A child whose favorite toy is taken shouts out, "That's mine and you can't have it!" We adults also often claim that what is ours is ours, rather than sharing what we have with those in need, those who have not.

While there are among us people of extraordinary wealth, there are also those among us who have nothing, including a place they can call home. We who have enough to eat and a warm place to sleep encounter over and over again those faced with the daily challenge of simply finding food and somewhere to stay warm. Today in this land of plenty there are those among us who claim to be Christian who are shouting again and again, "This is mine! Keep your hands off what I've earned. It's mine, just mine!" "Some immigrant or some lazy bum who is unwilling to work can't have any!" "Don't expect those of us who have our own to support those who have not!"

The early followers of Jesus also found themselves in a community of haves and have nots. But the scripture says that those who had land and houses sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles. "And it was distributed to each, to any who had need." Jesus still today calls us to share what we have with those who have not.

Prayer: Gracious one, freely have we received so much, help us to freely give.

Day 18 March 5 Jonathyn Kraig

Matthew 20: 1-16

On October 27th of last year, my grandmother passed away. She was the most important woman in my life. For her entire adult life my grandmother was a Jehovah's Witness, hardcore in her beliefs, especially her faith in God's grace. She was the gold standard of a faithful follower. My mother is also a Jehovah's Witness, but on the opposite end of the spectrum. She has been a poor follower of her faith and a terrible parent all my life. After my grandmother's passing, I watched my mother continue her lifelong pattern of mistakes and poor decisions.

I finally shared my unfiltered feelings with my mother. I talked about my upbringing with her compared to the guidance and devotion of my grandmother. I even spoke about my judgments of my mother, of her as a weak example of the faith she claims to follow. She told me that she had prayed to Jehovah for forgiveness and hoped that I would forgive her as well. I saw this as just another attempt to make herself feel better.

Then I read the parable in today's scripture. In the story, I was a judgmental observer. My grandmother is the worker who spent the entire day slaving in the hot sun, while my mother is the person who only worked an hour. Both received a full day's pay. My grandmother often said that she fell short as a "witness" but knew that God gave her grace. In contrast, my mother prayed for forgiveness, without admitting harm or changing her actions. Yet God offers grace to both – hard truth for me to accept.

What have I learned? That each person's relationship to God is between only that personem and God. God gives us all undeserved grace, and only God gets to judge how we use it.

Reflections:

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Day 19
March 6
Teresa Canady
Isaiah 1:16-17

Rules, "shoulds," is a list of things to do and not do. This scripture felt a bit guilt-inducing and bossy to me upon first reading it.

Growing up I learned that the Old Testament rules were important for God's children as guidance about morality, how to live, and what was right and wrong in this world. Then Jesus came. The model and teachings of Jesus Christ would supersede the cut and dried rules.

Now I believe each of us is responsible for reading and free to interpret these kinds of rules, to determine how they need to apply them to their lives today, through the lens of Christ's life and teachings. When I think about that lens, I imagine Christ's priority for grace and forgiveness over judgment, his compassion and empathy for every human regardless of their behavior or social status, his strength and clarity about justice for every human, and his courage to act on those beliefs. WWJD indeed!

So I read these injunctions again today and tried to weigh them with that lens in place. What do I need to take away from this list for my life today? For me, two items jumped out:

Learn to do right – Life-long learning is so important. I want to stay ready to learn new things about what "right" means.

Plead the case of the widow – Pleading a case means being a voice. I want to be brave enough to be a voice for anyone who needs an advocate.

Prayer: (from Psalm 119:18) Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. What is one takeaway from this set of rules, overlaid with the grace, life, and teachings of Christ, that I can carry with me or contribute today? Amen.

Day 20 March 7 Janet Crawley Matthew 22 vs. 36-40

The commandment to, "Love your neighbor as yourself" is one that I remember from my childhood. I took it to heart in my elementary years. I remember feeling so bad when a less fortunate girl in my class was made fun of and rarely chosen as a team member for kickball. I befriended her, feeling empathetic, and found her to be very kind. She made a great impact on my life through this connection and my realization that everyone is worthy.

This empathy got me in trouble, however, when I chose to defend another student being picked on by the playground bully. The bully and I got into a fight and there were consequences for both of us in the principal's office.

In the first story I showed empathy for the little girl, which improved both of our experiences. In the second instance I hurt the bully and got in trouble. That was not loving my neighbor as myself.

Simon Baron-Cohen in, "The Science of Evil," wrote about how prisoners were treated by the Nazi guards.

He found that in the presence of empathy there can be no evil, and that those who perpetrated torture have a total lack of empathy.

Brene Brown, known for her work on vulnerability and empathy, believes that you cannot place yourself into another's shoes and understand how they feel because you've never been them. However, you can try to connect with them, one human to another.

Through opening my heart and connecting to my neighbors, I literally practice loving my neighbor as myself. God is within each of us, and through that connection, I am practicing loving God with all my heart and soul and mind.

Action: Call or visit someone in your own neighborhood who may be lonely. Bring them a comforting prayer shawl or a plate of cookies to show you care.

Day 21 March 8 Jim Schone Matthew 23:23-24

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! ... You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. "

Ouch! Jesus certainly has a way of being direct with his criticisms.

With all the demands on our time and attention just to get through the day, it is all too easy to get caught up in the small things. In that effort to accomplish our daily activities, important as they may be, we can easily lose sight of the bigger picture and important matters that deserve our attention. Specifically, we can overlook our relationship with God, what God is calling us to do with our lives, and what we are doing with the gifts that God has given us to be used to help those around us.

I struggle with finding the right balance between short-term, easy-to- accomplish, tasks and the bigger-picture, more-challenging, even-daunting issues that require time to contemplate and to discern what path to follow. Jesus doesn't provide clear guidance regarding how to achieve this balance. But he does make it clear, very clear, that we need to do both.

Action: Find a quiet place to sit and relax for 5-10 minutes. As you get comfortable, try to shift your attention away from all of the to-do's of your day and focus your thoughts on the bigger picture. Specifically, think about what God is calling you do.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to find that balance between tackling the tasks at hand and stepping off the treadmill to see the bigger picture. May I always lead my life in a manner that is in keeping with my faith and that helps bring justice and mercy to your world.

Day 22 March 9 Deb Anderson Matthew 21:28-32

I can speak to this story. I have two sons. Either one of these boys would have annoyed me. However, I would have appreciated the one who showed up to help even though he said he wouldn't. And I would have remained annoyed for days at the one who said he would help but didn't.

So, imagine my surprise when Jesus said that I was not getting into the kingdom of heaven for thinking that. I also found that annoying.

But on further reading, I came to realize why Jesus was annoyed by my response. You see, the first son who said he wouldn't help and then changed his mind was like us when we hear of an opportunity to serve and decide to wait and see if anyone else signs up first. Then if no one does, we'll swoop in at the last minute.

The second son who said he'd show up, but didn't, turns out to be like us when we say we want to help out, or even plan to help out, and then bail out. Like those times we say we will pray for someone and soon forget to do it. Or when we plan to send a card, but never get around to it.

In many ways, I can identify with that second son. There are opportunities to participate in my church, in my neighborhood, in my state. But sometimes, I just don't show up. And I am forgiven for that. I am free to learn from that experience, free to begin to change.

Action: Do something. Do that thing that is in the back of your mind this morning.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, thank you for moving me forward. Help me to feel that nudge sooner and seize opportunities with joy.

Day 23
March 11
Acts 17:22-31
Isaac Pruden

If you are a mythology nerd like me, I can't recommend the book American Gods by Neil Gaiman too much. The story is set in an America where the old gods of religions are coming to a conflict with the new gods of things like technology, fame, and drugs. A key theme of the book is that humanity's faith and devotion are what create these new beings.

Reading Paul's words reminded me of American Gods and made me want to evaluate how I spend my time and where my devotion lies. Those who know me well know I'm a media and technology nerd. I particularly love movies. In 2022, watched over 400 movies. In 2023 I cut down to just about 275. Can I say that I spent an equal or even close to that amount of time in devotion to or time with God in either of those years? (Hint: no.)

I also don't think that Paul (or God) would say I need to devote all of my movie time back to the church. But I imagine tithing my time is something that they would both agree is a spiritually healthy option.

First Church is still trying to find its way back to a pre-covid level of congregational engagement. (Admittedly that is a little hard given that we aren't actually post-covid regardless of some public opinions.) That being said, I think the church is providing many opportunities for us to rediscover ourselves, individually and with each other, and I hope to take more advantage of them.

Action: Give some time and energy to those questions. Who is First Church? Who are we becoming? What are we doing to ensure that nobody ever comes across our altar and thinks it was to an "unknown god"?

Day 24 March 12 Ann Shaffer Matthew 28:16-20

Today's verses are generally referred to as "The Great Commission," the sending out of the first disciples to "make disciples of all nations." They make me think about teaching and missions.

For Protestants, "missions" has historically included going to non-Christians and educating them about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the teachings and the commandments of Jesus. Unfortunately, often the beliefs, values, and traditions of those non-Christians were not listened to or appreciated. Many missionary encounters were colonial and exploitative, and they did not always represent the example of Jesus in honoring all people.

Wally and I were fortunate and truly blessed to be able to go on two mission trips, in Honduras and Kenya, that were focused on service to and support of Methodist congregations and a hospital. Our activities were determined and led by the people we were serving. We learned about their countries, their needs, their traditions, their strengths, and their great joy in living out their Christian faith. We got to experience their music, boisterous services, welcoming spirit, and appreciation for our coming to their countries. We got to work with them towards accomplishing their goals. These trips were humbling experiences, as well as great learning and spiritual opportunities for us.

I believe that the best teachers are those who can listen to their students, meet them where they are, and learn from them. This is a central teaching of Jesus, and he challenges us all to be both teachers and learners.

Action: Find an opportunity to connect with someone who has different beliefs, experiences, or traditions, and try to both learn from them and share with them.

Prayer: Holy Creator, Thank you for the variety of people, thoughts, and traditions in our world. Help us to seek to learn from them all. Amen

Day 25 March 13 Laura Celin

Job 12: 7-10

God gives life to everything. Everything. Not everything is made alike, but everything is made with a purpose. In God's hand is the life of every living thing. God created each of us with a purpose, even though we don't always know what that purpose is. Spending time in prayer, scripture reading, and reflection is how we find out.

As a college student I know what it's like to be in a time of transition and reflection. I have to think about what I want to do for the rest of my life, while second guessing almost all of my decisions, and worrying about disappointing other people. But the most important person I can't disappoint is myself. I have a friend who's taking a break from school in order to figure out what her purpose is in life. I remember asking her what she thought it might be; she told me that while she doesn't know what it is yet, it doesn't stop her from trying to figure it out.

What is most important is not letting the unknown stop you from trying to figure out what/who you are meant to be. You must recognize that everything and everyone has value in God's eyes and, therefore, should be appreciated and examined for what it teaches you about yourself and your purpose. Simple tasks - smiling at a stranger in the street, being there for a friend who needs it, showing up for a shift at work on your day off – all teach us about being with others. Nature, animals, plants, and every single component of God's diverse creation has a part to play and much to teach us. Don't let the unknown stop you from trying to figure out what you are meant to be.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to appreciate and learn from all of your creation. Amen.

Day 26 March 14 Sue Porter John 4:5-9

I had always believed in God and felt the Holy Spirit in my life, but Jesus was a distant player. He was not someone I could relate to. The hymn lyric "He walks with me" was not part of my reality. The argument that Jesus is God and the Spirit didn't resonate.

Then a wonderful pastor spoke to me about the human Jesus who lived a life of love and compassion. Around the same time, I received a postcard from a friend with the picture of an etching of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. It was a beautiful visual of who Jesus is and it affected me greatly. After all, he shouldn't have been talking to any woman and certainly not a woman who was an outcast due to her behavior and cultural affiliation. He quickly bypassed pleasantries and made her realize that he knew very well who she was. He allowed her to ask him questions. Their conversation dove into deep spiritual symbolism. She identified him as a prophet and said she knew the Messiah was coming, "who would proclaim all things to us." Ultimately, he revealed to her that he was the Messiah.

Through my conversation with the pastor and that postcard, I was shown how Jesus related not only to individuals on a very personal level but also with concern for all people. He transcended acceptable behavior and social expectations to reach individuals anywhere or at any time and to include people beyond geographical boundaries. Jesus is an includer to his Kin-dom.

Prayer: Creator God, Thank you for coming to us in many different ways – stories, art, music, nature. You meet us no matter who we are. Your love, acceptance, and desire for relationship transcends everything. Help us do the same for the people in our lives and the strangers we meet.

Day 27 March 15 Nancy Sherertz Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Thank you Pete Seger for putting these rich verses to music, and thank you Judy Collins for singing them so beautifully many years ago. I was immediately taken by both words and music when I first heard them, and they have stuck with me throughout my life.

When I was young, I connected the verses with the seasons of the year. It is so easy to experience the passing of the four seasons in Ohio. The springs are beautiful in their freshness, the summers glorious in their growth, the autumns colorful in their changing, and winters quiet in their cold. I was young then and I had not yet experienced the fullness of my own life – my life was still in its springtime.

I must now thank God for allowing me the time to experience all my seasons. Much of my life was busy with raising a family of three children, working in a career that I loved, volunteering for causes important to me, finding time for hobbies, getting together with family and friends. I didn't reflect on the seasons of my life because I was so busy living them.

Now I can look back, read each verse of today's scripture and see my life in them. The high of falling in love with my husband and being with him for over 50 years, the low of losing my father when I was young. The anger of friends being drafted to fight in an unnecessary war, the relief of relatives returning from war zones. The joy of giving birth to three daughters, the sadness of one having a disability. All these have been in the seasons of my life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for being my guiding light through life. You are with me, giving me strength and wisdom to go forward in life to face whatever may come. Amen.

Day 28
March 16
Tom Bruhns
Isaiah 42:1-5

Isaiah warned the Jews several hundred years before Christ of evils that would – and did – befall them because of their disregard for God's laws. Those prophecies lead up to Chapter 42, where hopefulness returns.

Isaiah is the messenger of words directly from God, who promises to send a servant in whom God delights and in whom God will put God's spirit. Who is this servant? Not a king, but a gentle creature who would not harm a bruised stalk or extinguish a dim lamp (or a damaged person or one in despair.) He doesn't need loud noise or attention, and he'll never give up on his mission to bring justice – God's justice – to the whole Earth.

Indeed, this is the Christ I know from the chronicles of the New Testament. This is the Christ who shines light into dark corners, who goes where others – out of fear of lepers or disdain of blind beggars – fear to tread. Not only does this Christ communicate with the outcast but helps them, contrary to the unwritten (human) laws of behavior at that time.

The servant Isaiah describes epitomizes God's second great law: love thy neighbor, no exceptions. We don't see how far the "no exceptions" goes till we see Christ in the New Testament and learn that a beggar is not an exception, nor a blind man, nor a leper, nor a spurned woman.

Is it possible to love your neighbors, every one, throughout the world, and stand up for what is right under God's law, without violating many of the laws of humans, written and unwritten? Was Christ an anarchist, ignoring the laws of man because they violated God's law? If you truly love every neighbor, have you become an anarchist, too?

Day 29
March 18
Reagan Page
Acts 2: 42-47

Jesus was gone at this point in the scriptures, but his teachings lived on in his believers. The community of followers ate together and prayed together and gave possessions to anyone who had need. There are no specific rules laid out in this passage on "how to be a Christian." We simply see people living as Jesus would hope, mirroring how Jesus treated all people. And because of the actions and attitudes of this community of believers, "the Lord added to the number of those being saved," which I understand to mean people were seeing the good actions of this community and were being drawn into it.

Community and fellowship are central to religion and to Jesus' love. Everyone deserves to experience connection, and we should open our tables to those who aren't welcome at all tables. We need to love and listen, to serve one another, to share ourselves, and the stories of Jesus. We may not be able to give quite like they did (selling property and possessions), but we can see this as a model of generosity and a way to frame thoughts of service to others.

I especially like that all of these actions are done with glad and sincere hearts. (No Grinches here!) You give love, you get love.

Action: Spend time with someone you love. Open your table to those you don't yet love.

Prayer: Jesus, Help us be in fellowship with one another and bring those who do not have community of their own into ours. Make us glad to sincerely give to those in need.

Day 30 March 19 Joe Frost Luke 16:10-12

Some people are brutally honest; others soften their approach with "little white lies." Which ones are more likely to be honest in matters that have important, serious consequences? I'm not sure.

For mathematicians, there is a distinction between "if A then B" versus "if not A then not B." It seems clear to me that aside from the occasional "little white lies," someone who is dishonest in small things is very likely to be dishonest in big things. That "someone who can be trusted with small things can be trusted with much" isn't self-evident to me. For some people, there is a threshold beyond which the temptation is too much to resist. People who are dishonest in small things often simply have no regard for truth and will say whatever will serve them at the time.

There is a developmental stage of "getting away with things" that some people never outgrow. The cute image of my five-year-old granddaughter saying she has no idea where the cookies went with a chocolate- smeared face is completely different from the image of an adult doing the same thing.

When trusted with a fiduciary position, this passage is dead on, except that the temptation can grow with the size of the prize. Well-run organizations, like most churches, have audits of their books to protect the reputations of the financial officers as well as to significantly raise the stakes of succumbing to temptation. I've seen too many organizations in which slap-dash oversight was rewarded with significant losses siphoned by someone who "always intended to return the money when times got better."

Dishonesty is destructive to your soul, however you define it. I truly feel sorry for scam artists who have grabbed huge sums because I can only imagine what sick, shriveled souls they have.

Day 31 March 20 Teresa Benedict

Acts 16: 13-15

I'm sure I've read these verses before and not given much thought to them other than showing another example of Paul's work on his missionary journey. But then I was given this Lenten devotional assignment, so I took a deeper dive.

There was no synagogue in Phillipi, so Paul and his disciples went out of the city gate, down to the riverside, where Jews were known to meet for prayer, in order to observe the sabbath. They met a group of women gathered there, joined them, began speaking with them, and taught them the scriptures.

We learn the name of one of the women present, Lydia, who was referred to as a "god-fearing woman." Extra research says she is thought to be a Gentile who believed as the Jews did, was a successful business woman, and was the head of her household (possibly due to widowhood).

God opened Lydia's mind and heart to hear and accept Paul's message of salvation. In response, she and all her household were baptized. It is believed she was the first documented convert to Christianity in Europe.

After her baptism she invited Paul and his disciples to come to her home and stay, which they were persuaded to do. I love *The Message Bible* which states, "we hesitated, but she wouldn't take no for an answer."

The Message states this invitation to her home came "in a surge of hospitality." The dictionary definition of hospitality is "generous and friendly treatment of visitors and guests." Most of us would not invite virtual strangers to stay with us, but we can view hospitality in a broader sense: being open to meeting the needs of others.

Action: Observe the needs of people you come across/ Meet those needs when you can.

Day 32
March 21
Holly Harvey
Ephesians 2:19

I remember growing up in Sunday School and being told over and over again that church isn't a building, it's people. The pandemic suddenly showed the truth of that statement. I never realized how much I would miss going to services, how I would wish I could have the Hawaiian rolls and Welch's grape juice at communion one more time.

There's something very powerful about being connected to Christ and "fellow citizens with the saints" who have come before that happens when we participate in the same sacraments they did. In today's world, where the surgeon general has declared loneliness an epidemic and the COVID pandemic still has lingering effects, I think that we all long for connection even more than ever.

We all bring our own burdens with us when we walk into the First Church narthex.

Our imperfections, vices, quirks may seem overwhelming to us, but somehow, when we come together, God is there.

Whether the person sitting next to us is a stranger to us or has been our pewmate for the past 30 years, God is in them, too. We don't have to have all of the answers to be a dwelling place for the Spirit.

Prayer: Holy God, we remember that all of us are made in your image and that we belong to one another.

Action: Find the courage to reach out to someone new.

Day 33 March 22 Kathryn Nelson Matthew 6:31-34

Sometimes I have a need that's bigger than I can handle. After surgery, I'd just returned to work half-time, when Bill lost his building manager position in a change of ownership. We had to vacate the manager's unit in 10 days. Finding housing that quickly with little money and half a paycheck felt unlikely, so we sat together while I prayed, "Spirit, you're all-knowing and all-powerful and we're not, so we'd appreciate any help you can give us. Thank you for all our blessings."

Confident that Spirit would see to our very real need, I recommended we go wander the neighborhood to see what Spirit had in store for us. Eventually we came across two elderly ladies on a porch above a daunting flight of stairs. Recognizing the former "shared house" of a friend who'd moved a year before, we inquired and learned they'd be renting it in two weeks for almost exactly our cash resources. Bill agreed to fill all 4 bedrooms with good renters before the end of the first month.

We moved into what would've been the dining room of that house and enjoyed a changing "family" of wonderful housemates for 17 years. All of us were thankful for having "impossibly" low rent in a neighborhood nicer than any of us could've afforded on our own.

Over the decades I've experienced many similar "miracles." I believe that my prayer was not necessary to remind Spirit to love, help, and direct me. That prayer was a way to remind me of the true Source of that love, help, and direction.

Day 34 March 23 Craig Matthews

Psalm 51: 15-17

Ritual worship, as we see it in the Old Testament among God's people, typically involved sacrifice. People would bring something of value to the place of worship as a sacrifice to God. Incense would be used with a burnt offering to create a pleasing aroma to God, in hopes that God would receive the sacrifice and forgive the sins of the people.

In this passage in Psalms, David understands that God doesn't care about animal sacrifices and religious performances if there is no heart and devotion behind them. God wants us to authentically follow and worship Him because we want to, not to just go through the actions because we are told to or because of tradition.

Our worship is not just singing songs in Sunday morning church services or being involved in church groups. It is much more than that. Worship is living a life that acknowledges that God really does have everything under control (otherwise,God wouldn't be God) and that He is loving and just and merciful and faithful. Our deep,, heartfelt worship means everything to God because He loves us so much that He sacrificed Himself for us.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to find ways to worship you with my whole heart throughout each day. Amen.

Day 35 March 25 Beth Snyder

Mark 2: 23-28

We know Jesus and the Pharisees often didn't see eye to eye.

Reading this Mark passage, it seems the Pharisees didn't like the fact that the disciples picked and ate some heads of wheat on the Sabbath. They saw this as "work" and therefore, a breaking of the Sabbath law. Jesus wasn't having any of their pickiness. He was more about people having something to eat when they are hungry. But I wonder about Jesus's response, "The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren't created for the Sabbath."

What should Sabbath be about? To the Pharisees and their kind, it is about keeping many rules, more than are needed.

I think Sabbath is for rest and for being with God. For celebrating God's gifts of creation. For spending time with God. Remembering God's promises requires time, and taking a break from usual activities is good for us. These seem more to the point of Sabbath.

I've recently been reading Flunking Sainthood by Jana Riess. For one month she tried to follow Orthodox Jewish rules for the Sabbath. Referring back to the title, you can imagine how that went. I'm not going that far.

Attending church has been a long time part of my Sundays. It's required effort for me to do ordinary tasks either on Saturday or delay them until Monday, but it feels good to keep the Sabbath. Enjoying friends, reading, quilting (creative, not work for me), maybe even taking a nap. These make sense both in terms of faith and restoring myself.

Prayer: Loving God, help us find ways to honor and enjoy you on Sundays.

Day 36 March 26 Kristina Gonzalez 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, 16-18

I've been missing my mom lately. 'Mo', 'Mom', 'Mamasita,' passed from this life in early 2022. She was 87 and lived courageously – not in all ways, but in many ways. In missing her and my dad - 'Father,' 'My Father,' who passed in 2015 – I discover and rediscover the lessons they taught me through how they lived their lives. These lessons are deeply embedded in my psyche. I strive to be a better person because of my parents' modeling.

The passages for today seem misplaced in Holy Week. Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth is written after Jesus' death. It is a word of encouragement and hope to the church in a dark and disorienting time; it is also a call to remember a life well-lived. Jesus modeled a way of living that threatened the established religious and social order. He lifted social outcasts, and he challenged the powerful. He built a caring community. He died orienting the world toward life.

This Holy Week we'll experience again the injustice of Jesus' death. Still, Paul reminds us that no death is final. He reminded the church in Corinth – and reminds us today – that we are disciples of Jesus the Christ, taught by his life and death to live well. Despite the disruptions in our own lives and the destruction we see in the world daily, we are not to lose hope because we carry within us the life lessons that can heal a broken world. Our relationship to Jesus shapes us, just as our earthly mentors have shaped us. We can shape the world.

Action: Think about the injustices in the world today. For whom or what does your heart break? Following that passion, take one action today – large or small – that represents your understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Day 37 March 27 Barbara Moreland Isaiah 43:15-24

In this passage we hear the prophet Isaiah delivering a message from God to the captured and enslaved people of Israel. Isaiah reminds the people of certain facts. They have not kept their side of the agreement God made with them when God brought them from Egypt and made them a new nation (verses 22-24). As a result they are now in exile, enslaved by the Babylonians. But in these verses Isaiah also reminds them that their God – the all powerful creator of the universe – has saved them from enemies in the past, specifically the escape from Egypt where their masters were "quenched like a wick." Finally, God promises to answer and act on their prayers for help. In other words: "You messed up (again). You are asking me for help (again). I will deliver you from your enemies (again)."

In this passage the people's pleas are answered with a new kind of hope. God tells the people not to dwell on what happened in the past because God is "about to do a new thing?" From our 21st century perspective, we understand this to be a promise about the coming of Jesus, and the new way of relating to God that Jesus offers.

Move to 2024. How many times has God watched us make the same bad choices, act in the same unloving way, take the same "easy road" into trouble? How many prayers have we begun with, "Please help me" or "I'm so sorry that I ..." or "I really messed up this time." Prayers to which God always answers, "I will release you from exile." "I forgive your mistakes." "Learn from my Son's teachings."

Action: Don't look backward, look ahead. There is hope. Ther is always hope. Hear God's promise: "I will do a new thing."

Day 38 March 28 Greg Wallace

Mathew 26: 17-35

This passage immediately calls up Leonardo Da Vinci's famous mural in Milan, depicting Jesus and his disciples at the table. The setting has been imagined by artists throughout the centuries because the scene depicts a powerful and pivotal moment in Christian history.

Jesus directs his disciples to prepare a Passover meal, the great Jewish feast that recalls and celebrates God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the central redemptive act of the Old Testament. Celebrating Passover was familiar to Jesus; but this time was different. Jesus knew what his disciples did not, that in a few days he would be crucified. Jesus knew he would be betrayed. He knew this was his last meal. He was preparing himself for death. More significantly, he was preparing his disciples for a future without him.

After blessing the bread, Jesus gave it to his disciples and said, "Take, eat, this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he said "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The simplicity and calmness of Jesus' words are stunning, "take, eat" and "drink from it, all of you." In instructing his disciples to prepare and participate in the Passover meal, Jesus used the setting to establish the new covenant through communion, to foreshadow his imminent crucifixion, and to model the redemptive significance of his sacrifice for our sins. This act of sacrifice and redemption was not just for his disciples, but "for many."

Prayer: Gracious God, during this season of Lent, let us remember the last supper and celebrate the new covenant of forgiveness and redemption.

Action: The table is set, and Jesus has invited us all to join. "Take, eat." "Drink from it, all of you."

Day 39 March 29 Claire Gebben Luke 23: 26-49

Today is the hardest day of Lent, the remembrance of the persecution and crucifixion of Jesus. With grim despair I hear this account every year, and I am frustrated by how little has changed. We are still so quick to judge, to vilify, to harm one another.

For me, the mention in today's passage of the weeping women brings to mind "Stations of the Cross" procession I attended in the year 2000. On that misty, chilly Good Friday morning, a number of hardier Christians gathered outdoors at St. Joseph's Chapel on Second Avenue to participate in a procession through downtown Seattle to various pre-selected stations for scripture, reflection, and prayer. My mother had died that October, and as I straggled along I found myself thinking often of her.

The procession ended at Plymouth Congregational Church. The lights were not on in the sanctuary, the gray daylight adding to the pall of the passage where "darkness came over the whole land."

When "Jesus breathed his last," I began to weep. Yes, like the women in today's scripture, I was mourning for Jesus, but mostly, I was mourning for my mother. Jesus's life and hers suddenly struck me as similar. Not that my mother died like Jesus on the cross; she died of Alzheimer's after a long, full life. But like Jesus, she had done the best she could. She had endeavored valiantly to spread goodness and love to everyone she met and to build a loving family. She had nourished and loved us unconditionally, and she also forgave us, her far-from-perfect sons and daughter, for our numerous transgressions. She did all the good she could for as long as she could. Then breathed her last.

Action: Practice forgiveness by saying a prayer for someone who has hurt you.

Day 40 February 14 Peter Jabin Jeremiah 31:8-13

Why this text from Jeremiah, "the weeping prophet," for the Easter Vigil, for this suspended pause between Good Friday's crucifixion and Easter Morning's resurrection? Presumably because of its promise of restoration, because of the turn from mourning to joy, the trading of sorrow for gladness. Jeremiah's voice is used to say to the Christian community, "Jesus will rise again, and we will be

restored; our lives shall become like a watered garden." All will be well.

But what does such a promise mean for us, today, in the face of the decimation of Gaza? What does resurrection mean for the children suffering and dying in Ukraine, Sudan, Syria, North Korea, and so many other places in our world? What do we do with this promise of restoration amid the ever-increasing extinction of species and a rapidly deteriorating climate crisis? All is not well, nor was it for those to whom Jeremiah spoke. Holy Saturday is the between time, the time of uncertainty, of not knowing, of fully registering our losses, of deeply feeling our grief.

It is an act of profound faith to linger in these experiences, in a culture that has little tolerance for these "inferior" aspects of human existence. For we do live in vigil times; we are called to remain awake through the dark night.

Action: Weep. Mourn. Let the pain and sorrows of the world reach you. Don't rush too quickly into the arms of God's Easter promise of restoration. Let the pain and sorrow of the world break your heart, break you open. This is how our love and compassion grow large enough to contain the world. Rest in grief; trust it. Easter will come ~ in the fullness of time.

Prayer: Kyrie eleison. Lord, have mercy.



