



Wednesday, March 6, 2019 – Pastor Karen Brau

Readings: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12; 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21; Psalm 51:1-17

In 2017, the Weavings Journal concluded its ministry. I was sad about this, because Weavings had become my friend over its life cycle, and was pretty sure it was monitoring our lives as living and breathing congregations. In 2012, Weavings published a journal with the theme of Resilience, just in time for Lent.

That issue is again on time for today. The one article I saved from this issue is an article by Larry Peacock entitled, “The Resilience Spiral,”

Through exploring studies of people who survived particular situations that were traumatic, the researchers came up with the notion of the resilience spiral. The article considers the pressures of getting bigger and better and always improving, and the major discomfort that can ensue when a person hits a snag. A snag can generate a response of all or nothing, with giving up seeming to be the best option. I know what that is like.

Yet, this piece on the resilience spiral has us consider life as not just an ever upward line, but a line that circles back on itself, before moving upward again. The writer poses the question, you believe in the resurrection, don't you?

Larry Peacock continues: Resilience is trusting that the curve will come back up. Trust is the essential key in resilience, trusting that once the curve heads south, God is still at work in the midst of the shifts and changes. Don't jump off and crash, but pay attention; trust and learn some practices to hold you until the new emerges.”

What helps you support a practice of resilience? Sometimes it helps me to journal, or sing, maybe talking with a spiritual companion, or weeping. And applying the Resilience Spiral to communities or congregations, what are our communal practices that help us hold our life together until the new emerges?

Our Isaiah 58 scripture talks about a God who guides and rebuilds. Do we believe in this kind of God?

We welcome you to the writings of our congregation. There are more than 40 — the abundance of our congregation has come to life! Thank you all.

Let us Pray: Holy One, we give thanks that you love us so deeply that you guide us in every season of our lives. Please travel with Luther Place this Lent, nurturing us in ways that deepen our faith. And through your faithfulness towards us, may we trust that even in the days when things around us and in us might be dying, you are always calling us to new and resurrected life. Amen.

Thursday, March 7, 2019 – Debbie McDaniel

Readings: Exodus 5:10-23; Acts 7:30-34; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” Psalm 91:1

A reminder for us, especially in the tough stuff, that we never walk alone. Full heat of troubles bearing down hard, heavy, it's a struggle at times to keep trudging through it all. Pressure and stress can seem as stifling as a hot afternoon summer sun. Yet God whispers truth, strong and sure, “Walk in my shadow, up close to my side. It's in the safe place that brings confidence; for when we are resting in God's shadow, we will never face the full heat of our difficulties. He shelters from that pain. His shade, His shadow, diminishes what is actually felt in the intensity of all the heat. Rest, peace, and calm rise up strong, right in the struggling mess of life, and we're assured, He's in control.

Don't ever doubt it. God works on behalf of those who love Him and honor His name. He is so good to us. We may never fully know, this side of heaven, how very much He has sheltered us from in this life.

Dear God, Thank you for your presence with us, thank you for your Almighty Shadow. Thank you that you go before us, and cover us from behind. Thank you that you are in our midst, and that our future is secure in the place you're preparing for us.

Your words bring such hope and comfort. Remind us of your strength today, may we see glimpses of your glory and blessing along the way as we seek after you. For victory and salvation are found in you alone. In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

Thursday, March 8, 2019 – Margaret Z.

Readings: Exodus 6: 1-13; Acts 7:35-42; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Life is a challenge! How often have we heard these words? Everyone faces times in their lives where circumstances go awry and we're presented with a difficult task. For example, the other day a teenage girl whom I hadn't met before, was distraught, so I asked her if I could help. She said that she had no meaning in her life, had little faith and didn't know what to do or where to turn. What do you say to someone to comfort them, to ease their pain, a summation in one or two minutes, before she melts into your past? How do you lead this child out of despair, to tell her that she is surrounded by love, not only by those who care but by Our Father; that she is safe in God's care and that God will be her guide. In our scripture reading Exodus 6:1-13, Moses has doubts about his leadership and appeals to God. Even Jesus expresses his deepest feelings to the Lord, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" It's not about the past, or future, but the present. God is there for Jesus and Moses in the moment, to guide, to give strength and to lead. If we open our heart and mind to His ability to help us sort through our issues, we will find strength not thought possible. We do this through prayer.

Prayer:

Dear God, guide us to do good things, to help people, and to give them our strength to cope in time of need. Help us lead, mentor and teach our youth to become strong leaders. Please dear God, help this young teenager. Give her strength to find purpose, happiness in her daily life and guidance to help

Saturday, March 9, 2019 – Christiana Lundholm

Readings: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, John 12:27-36, Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven – Ecclesiastes 3:1

There are a lot of small moments in today's readings that would make fertile soil for a reflection on resilience, but when I turned to the reading from Ecclesiastes, I knew this was where I wanted to focus my time. If you haven't already, take a few minutes to read the whole thing through slowly, and really let it sink in.

I've sometimes heard this passage read in a way that suggests we should just be resigned to whatever comes along, because after all, everything has its time. Going through a rough patch? Oh well, that's just the way it is, must be a time to weep.

But reading it in the context of a reflection on resilience, the words fall into my heart very differently. What if it is really telling us to take note of the shape of our present moment, and ask questions about what a "right response" might be? Is it time to clear stones out of a field as we get ready to plow? Or is it time to gather stones to build a foundation? Is it time to seek a new friend, or a new experience? Or is it time to let go of something we have been hanging on to for too long? Is it time to mourn with the deep pain in our world? Or is it time to dance because the rhythm is so strong and we just can't help ourselves? Perhaps even mourning *and* dancing, both at once?

It seems to me that this wisdom is what enables true resilience in our own lives and the lives of our communities – the discernment to know what is needed in each moment and the grace to do it, whether that be weeping or laughing, breaking down or building up, keeping silence or speaking.

Loving God, help us to be present to what you ask of us in each moment today, and grant us the strength to respond in ways that build up the life of our community. Amen.

Sunday, March 10, 2019 – Ed Miller

Readings: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 (11)

Spiritual guide, Robert Wicks, writes:

“Spiritual resilience is not simply recovering from adversity. It is about bouncing back in a way that deeper knowledge about both God and self may result. With the right guidance, during difficult times and periods of confusing, pain and stress, we have a unique opportunity to nurture our relationship with God and enable it to grow in surprising ways. “

I like these words, and I know also through all my years of ministry, the importance of self-love when it comes to resilience. Receiving the gift of God calling us beloved is really important. It can be that self-love that give us the capacity to move from “why me,” towards asking how do I faithfully cope with the situation I am in?

Prayer:

Thank you, God, for calling me beloved. May I receive this as real. And when I face challenges in my life or in my community’s life, I ask that you help me cope, and perhaps even grow.
Amen.

Monday, March 11, 2019 – Olga Acosta Price

Readings: 1 Chronicles 21:1-17; 1 John 2:1-6; Psalm 17

The thread that connects these readings for me is that of the importance of recognizing the sinner in ourselves as well as our need to be grateful to God for his willingness to forgive us time and time again, regardless of our imperfections. The line in 1 John: “But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” (1 John 2:1) is a reminder that Jesus yearns to be our closest friend and confidante, he wants to be with us as we face temptations and work to overcome our trials and tribulations. It is the unwavering support we get from God that make us resilient, “capable of being able to recover quickly from difficulties”. Jesus showed us how to be resilient, by trusting in God faithfully, demonstrated through his ultimate sacrifice so that we could find forgiveness and salvation. Although I strive to live as Jesus did, my pride, impatience, stubbornness, and self-righteousness make that aim impossible to achieve. Yet, it isn’t the denial of my sins that brings me closer to God, but the transparent acknowledgement of my sins, along with my remorse and desire to be better, that yields good fortune because, as David proclaims, “his mercy is very great”.

Dear Lord, please be a constant reminder to us that it is only with and through you that we have the sustained capacity to recover from the challenges that life presents. May we remain grateful for the generosity of your unconditional love as we admit our flaws and shortcomings, so that we can face each hurdle with the fortitude and strength necessary to prevail.

Tuesday, March 12, 2019 – Thomas Chacko

Readings: Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21; Psalm 17

These readings describe the constancy of human nature over time. Zechariah, the prophet, and Peter, the apostle, mention that people in their time lived in deceit and in disobedience to God causing despair and destruction in their lives. But the constancy of God's love and mercy reaches all who seek forgiveness and reconciliation. The cry of the psalmist – verse 6, I call upon you, O God and incline your ear to me, hear my words; verse 7, Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand - is a powerful reminder of God's patient presence of strength and steadfast love to the faithful.

Prayer - Ever-present God, you are our refuge at all times and may the millions of refugees across all continents receive safety, security and sanctuary to build new lives.

Wednesday, March 13, 2019 – Besty Mountenay

Readings: Job 1:1-22; Luke 21:34 - 22:6; Psalm 17

As a child, I concluded my favorite nursery rhyme as follows: "When she was good/ she was very very good/and when she was bad/she was worried." Adorable malaprop from a child unfamiliar with the distinctly Dickensian word "horrid"? Perhaps. But I also think I was writing my autobiography. I was then, and am now, a habitual worrier. Worrying doesn't always seem like a weakness. After all, anxiety has played a part in me being an impeccably behaved schoolgirl, a responsible teenager, a workplace success. Fear of disappointment, punishment, disgrace is a great motivator.

So imagine how insulted I felt when I read Christ preach the following to his disciples: "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth." I was very much *not* the party girl, thank you, so why should I be dismissed along with this crowd?

Perhaps a great deal of my worrying is at odds with my love of Christ. It is a lack of faith that makes me so fearful of a plethora of bad outcomes, so certain that the worst possible outcome is always at hand. God has given us the power of prayer to allay our worries, but I never seem to use it as well as I should. And much of what keeps me up at night is temporal and insignificant, stealing attention from heavy matters. So this Lent, I will not be giving up sweets because I'm fretting over my waistline or some other frivolity. Instead, I'm going to work to find the resilience to keep the anxieties of life off of my heart and use prayer to realign my thoughts on the wonder of God's glorious love. For if Lent is a time to reflect on that which is not transient and does not fail us, then we need resilience to shut out everything else.

Prayer: Grace-filled God, you have given us your Son as a model of love that is beyond this world. Grant me the resilience to see the wonders of your great love.

Thursday, March 14, 2019 – Kathryn Perry

Readings: Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Philippians 3:2-12; Psalm 27

Forty days to prepare ourselves to observe the final portion of Jesus' journey to the cross, death and resurrection: the season of Lent is a time to add on rather than giving up. More prayer, more love, more smiles, more service to others and more self-examination.

The 27th Psalm of David was my mother's favorite. When Alzheimer's had robbed her of memories cognition and speech, one thing remained: Jesus. She would repeat his name in a tone of voice that was clear and focused--- her pre=Alzheimer's voice

“Wait and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD”

Friday, March 15, 2019 – Sarah Johnson

Readings: Genesis 14:17-24, Philippians 3:17-20; Psalm 27

Over the years I have seen countless directions or challenges of creative ways to use the Bible as a road map for specific areas of life. A common one in my youth group, during the late '90s and early '00s, was to put the name of someone you wanted to date (read: court) in the place of "love" in 1 Corinthians 13 to see if it rang true. Were they patient? Kind? Someone who doesn't keep a record of wrongs? I file that memory under amusing, but can honestly also see its merit. At first read, my thoughts about Psalm 27 took a detour to songs written from this text that we used to sing in those youth group days, with the lyrics "Whom shall I fear?" and the entirety of "Better is One Day" running through my mind. Then I started to use the 1 Corinthians approach and put my name into the text.

The Lord is the stronghold of Sarah's life.
Though war break out against her, even then, Sarah will be confident.
Sarah will make music and sing to the Lord.
Sarah will see the goodness of the Lord.
Sarah will wait for the Lord.

I reread, asking myself- "Are these statements true?" Do I keep my confidence in the Lord no matter the trials? Am I intentional in seeking them? Am I waiting for their timing?

In uncertain times, patience and trust can be so very difficult. These texts are such a great reminder of the comfort and assurance that are always offered, especially in times of trial.

These passages also reminded me of another challenge from those youth group days: "If you are feeling distant from God, guess who moved." If we do not have confidence, if we are not waiting, if we are not trusting in the timing and goodness of the Lord, it is not that they have distanced themselves from us. The Lord and their promises are available to us at any time. What a wonder that is.

Lord, we are reminded of your steadfastness and your grace. May we draw near to you in times of trial and of triumph and be mindful to trust in your timing. We are grateful for the capacity for resilience you have given us and that while our focus and confidence may waver, you never do. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Saturday, March 16, 2019 – Collin Bradley

Readings: Psalm 118:26-29; Matthew 23:37-39; Psalm 27

My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, Lord, I will seek. (Psalm 27: 8). Sometimes, I don't find this to be true of myself at all. Seeing the face of God seems like a terrifying thing at times. The Israelites believed that seeing God directly would either strike you dead (I imagine faces melting a la "Raiders of the Lost Ark,") or, if you were worthy like Moses, transform you in such a way that would also be terrifying.

But then I remember what the angel told the shepherds of Bethlehem, and again what Jesus told his covering disciples on the turbulent sea: "be not afraid." Even though we are indeed, unworthy, we are still loved beyond all words or measures. God is our Mother Hen. No matter how many times we go running off chirping into trouble, she *always* welcomes us back under her wings to protect us from the winds and storms of our lives.

I doubt that we humans will ever fully understand how deep and profound the love of God is during our earthly lives. But, like the Psalmist, I will remain confident that we will see the goodness and love of our Lord in the land of the living, and I pray that God gives us the courage to always accept that love when we see it.

Amen

Sunday, March 17, 2019 – Jay Forth

Readings: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17--4:1; Luke 13:31-35; Psalm 27 (5)

“Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.”

“For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Paul reminds his audience in Philippi what they probably know all too well, that there many who live contrary to the Gospel. Who are these “enemies of the cross”? Maybe Paul was referring to local officials; maybe he was referring to the general population at Philippi; or, maybe he was referring to certain people within the congregation. Even though it is not clear who Paul has in mind as “enemies of the cross,” I believe his words give important counsel for us today.

When surrounded by injustice, greed, and selfishness, how can Christians remain faithful? Paul encourages the church at Philippi to observe and imitate examples of faithfulness. In our own difficult time, we, too, can find resources for resilience by identifying the individuals, communities, and movements that exhibit the life to which we have been called in Christ. By identifying these examples, we create for ourselves a lineage of resistance. A lineage from which we can learn from the prayers, tactics, triumphs, and failures those who exhibited Christian faithfulness in the midst of unjust and challenging times. By meditating on a lineage of resistance, we can gain the wisdom and the strength to live faithfully in our own day.

Loving God, turn our eyes to your faithful ones, past and present. Help us learn from their deeds, to grow from their wisdom, to imitate their faithfulness. Drawing on the riches of their lives, may we discern how to follow Christ in the face of today's challenges. Amen.

Monday, March 18, 2019 – Sandy Chacko

Readings: Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12; Psalm 105:1-15 [16-41] 42

PSALM 105:4 - Look to the Lord and be strong; at all times seek his presence.

Life challenges and hardships can cause us to become angry, frustrated, and depressed. If we continue in such negative thoughts and emotions, despair may take control over our lives. Resilience helps us to persevere, to recover, to overcome life problems and obstacles and to find our way. Desmond Tutu says hope is the antidote of despair. He states that despair turns us inward whereas hope sends us into the arms of other. Tutu further states that hope requires faith. Psalm 105:4 points out the importance of our faith in God. We are to look to the Lord our God and to seek God's presence at all times. By doing so faithfully we will be strong and resilient in our life endeavors and we will be able to embrace others in the community with our hope, love, and compassion.

Dear Lord help us to look to you everyday for your love, support and guidance so that we may have the strength and resilience in our own lives and for helping others.

Tuesday, March 19, 2019 – Susan Boyle

Readings: Numbers 14:10b-24; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Psalm 105:1-15 [16-41] 42

Daily I need to remind myself that I am powerless. Powerless over people, places, and things. That my powerlessness becomes serenity when I place my trust in my God who “will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” (1 Corinthians 10: 13-14). Our suffering is universal and does not separate us from each other, nor from God. Psalm 105 urges me to “seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually”. During times of despair, illness, death of loved ones, and hopelessness over the world’s struggles I turn toward the eternal presence of steadfast love. I take just one step on a path that is unknown to me; and yet the source of strength.

Lord, I ask you today to open my heart to trust your direction. Guide my feet on the right path and stand with me during my trials. Amen

Wednesday, March 20, 2019 – Justin Fitch

Readings: 2 Chronicles 20:1-22; Luke 13:22-31; Psalm 105:1-15 [16-41] 42

After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle. II Chronicles 20:1

Upon receiving word that a great multitude was coming against him, the first thing said of Jehoshaphat is that he was afraid. History tells us Jehoshaphat was 35 when he began his reign as the King of Judah, and here this mature leader is afraid. He's suddenly faced with a terrible situation and fears the unknown outcome. But after those three words "Jehoshaphat was afraid," the verse immediately goes on to say, "he set himself to seek the Lord." Notice there is no condemnation for Jehoshaphat's reasonable fear, yet he does not linger in this feeling nor let it halt him. Jehoshaphat prays to God a prayer filled with faith that ends in verse 12: "For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

Jahaziel proclaims Judah will see the victory of the Lord and that they need not fear. Easier said than done, no? But Jehoshaphat believed. He told the people to sing and praise the Lord in holy splendor as they went before the army, saying, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever." Jehoshaphat and the people praised God *before* the battle.

Oh, that we would have the faith to believe God goes before us no matter what situation comes our way, and that we too would praise and seek Her when we are afraid.

Thursday, March 21, 2019 – Emma Nothercott

Readings: Daniel 3:19-30; Revelation 2:8-11; Psalm 63:1-8

There are many golden images to which we are expected to bow down. Refusal might not result in being thrown into a fiery furnace, but there are surely consequences -- especially for those who are already marginalized and targeted. Amid all the demonstrations of earthly force and the ego of rulers, it can be difficult to believe in God's supreme power of deliverance.

The psalm of David in the wilderness of Judah reminds us that even when our human bodies and minds are distressed, our souls can be "satisfied as with a rich feast." Casting aside fear of suffering is no small thing, but through faith we remember God is with us in the most dreadful circumstances and in the most desolate places.

Guardian in the wilderness, help us practice resilience by standing with people in the world as it is while imagining the world as it should be.

Friday, March 22, 2019 – Ronald Young Jr.

Readings: Daniel 12:1-4; Revelation 3:1-6; Psalm 63:1-8

Resilience is defined as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness. The ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.

It's important to remember God in the face of adversity. We can look to him for strength in the midst of struggle. As it states in Isaiah 40:29-31 "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Here is God, equipping us, during a battle to survive and move forward. During the darkest times in our lives, by leaning on and trusting God, we find that after the struggle ends we appear unscathed. That doesn't mean that we don't remember the pain, or bear the scars. However the pain and scars become a testimony to God's ability to breed toughness in us.

How wonderful it is to serve a God who bolsters our abilities to be resilient. At our darkest hours and through tough times we can lift our heads to the Lord and know that through him we can survive. He is what puts us back into our original shape after facing challenges that should change us for the worse. The type of resilience we receive from God, doesn't just leave us the way we were. At first glance we may look the same on the outside, but in most cases through adversity God is improving us and making us well suited for the tasks and battles to come.

Resilience is about endurance and recovery. Remember that God grants us the strength for both.

Father God in the name of Jesus, I humbly ask that you continue to honor the message with receive from the Word and that you would always give us the strength we need to endure every test we face. I thank you in advance knowing that you continue to order our steps and know the best path for us moving forward. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

Saturday, March 23, 2019 – Kate Wulff

Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 6:43-45; Psalm 63:1-8

Today's scripture reminds of all the times, it feels like we did everything we were supposed to do and it still didn't turn out the way it was "supposed" to. We wonder where we went wrong. It's frustrating and being able to plough it all under sounds kind of satisfying. Resilience is remembering that God never promised perfection, but God's presence. That God is there and can help us find a way to keep going even in the difficult times.

Lord God, help us to remain resilient even in the difficult times.

Sunday, March 24, 2019 – Dan Corbett

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8

Our journey through Lent is a time of renewal, a time of contemplation and a time of remembering our baptism. However, many times we feel tested, stressed or just distracted. How can we stay focused on our spiritual journey while we also need to deal with stress, temptations, or even suffering and hopelessness?

Remember that God will always be there to help us complete the journey: "... God will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." (1 Cor. 10:13). When the owner of the vineyard wanted to cut down the unproductive fig tree, the manager of the vineyard pleaded with the owner, interceding for the tree (Luke 13:9). In the same way, Jesus intercedes for us and helps us to bear fruit, even if we're not doing such a good job of bearing fruit right now.

Today we pray for God to be our guide through our times of stress and difficulty. As we struggle for answers, help us to remain faithful in our Lenten journey.

Monday, March 25, 2019 – Bianca Vazquez

Readings: Jeremiah 11:1-17; Romans 2:1-11; Psalm 39

In psalm 39, David is both afflicted and in despair and yet who knows that God is his only hope (39:7). He has no one else to turn to. David's answer is simple and yet profound because life is so transient, we must live it for the Lord.

February met me with three significant deaths in two weeks. I've been thinking about loss and difficult times. How do I deal with my attitude at such times? How much do I complain or blame God? Do I turn away from our spiritual life, and our community, and instead, turn to the world and all the numbing opportunities it provides? Do I ever look to Jesus for accompaniment?

I am so scarily aware right now of how transient we are and yet, have spent the past few weeks both in a state of surrender and showered with love and care. When we encounter trials, what do we do? In light of the how transient we are, may we live each for for God and each other.

Tuesday, March 26, 2019 – Sarah Bagge

Readings: Ezekiel 17:1-10; Romans 2:12-16; Psalm 39

I recently got to be a part of a great workshop called [Liberation Logic](#) offered by two DC organizers. We looked at the different ways we've learned to get our needs met under systems of domination (like white supremacy) and practicing liberation - ways of "getting our needs met with love and dignity together" (or what we at Luther Place call the Beloved Community).

One part of domination logic that we talked about in the workshop is seeking the illusion of control. We believe we can make the world and other people work the way we want through force, coercion, or manipulation.

The three passages from today's lectionary feature people who are after control. The Israelite king in Ezekiel spends time cultivating alliances with one empire and then another (the eagles and cedars). In his efforts to control the situation, he leaves his people vulnerable and easy to uproot. In the Psalm, David describes people busily building up wealth, even though they have no control over whether they get to keep it or who will get to enjoy it some day. And while Paul's audience is not seeking physical comfort and safety, they are trying to control who can please God and who can't. Paul makes it clear that their efforts to define who's in and who's out are misguided.

The Psalm offers us an invitation to let go of the illusion of control. David reminds us twice that human life is "but a breath". This echoes the words we heard on Ash Wednesday - that we come from the earth and are going back to it. We get to experience the liberation of knowing that we are not the center.

Remind us that we don't have to control other people and the world around us. Give us a liberating sense of our connections to the earth and to each other.

Wednesday, March 27, 2019 – Anne Miller

Readings: Numbers 13:17-27; Luke 13:18-21; Psalm 39

“What is the Kingdom of God like?...It is like yeast kneaded into dough, which works unseen until it has risen high and light.”

God calls us to live “rooted” in our faith and to encounter Jesus in all facets of our lives, from the ordinary moments to the mysterious journeys, to the mountain-top experiences and the painful ones. In our faith we must trust in God to guide and lead us on this journey, which can be especially challenging during difficult times. As Jesus taught in this scripture, the kingdom of God is like yeast. As a few granules of yeast are kneaded into dough, the yeast is pushed, pulled, folded and worked into the dough. The yeast is no longer seen, it is one with the dough. And then God’s gifts of chemical reactions transform the dough, until it has “risen high and light.” It becomes the bread of life!

When my Father was bedridden for over a year after a long, difficult illness, Pastor Karen encouraged me to look for grace in unexpected spaces of caregiving. During that grueling, exhausting stretch, I was often at a loss to see God’s grace. But God works in ways we don’t always expect. As we approach the third anniversary of my Dad’s passing this April, I can truly say that through the grieving, with time, reflection, and prayer, I have been blessed with finally being able to feel and remember many moments of grace in those final years and months caring for my Father. These memories of grace and thanksgiving have filled and lifted my soul. Yes, the Kingdom of God is “like yeast kneaded into dough, which works unseen until it has risen high and light.”

Dear Lord – As we walk in faith with you, may we not be overwhelmed by troubled times, but to trust and be open to transformation so we can rise “high and light” and share your love with others.

Thursday, March 28, 2019 – Dianne Russell

Readings: Joshua 4:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:5; Psalm 32

The Jordan River at flood stage – overflowing its banks, powerful current, swirling eddies, dangerous velocity

Our lives and times at flood stage – overflowing issues & worries, powerful forces of hate & injustice, swirling eddies of racism & us/them, dangerous velocity of information & demands & urgency

In the midst of the River Jordan, Joshua leads the people of Israel to cross into the land of promise. And according to the previous chapter, they crossed not when the River was a trickle, but at flood stage. This crossing seems related to our daily efforts to navigate the fast-flowing current of today's news, and our commitments to family, work, and caring for the world. How can this be possible?

The repeated phrase in the Joshua story is the *middle of the Jordan*. After they (we?) safely cross, they were asked to go back to the middle of a raging river still held back by Yaweh's power.

And, despite the mystical phrase in 2 Corinthians 4:18 -- *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal* – the people of Israel needed a tangible way to see and remember the power of God. From Joshua 4:5-7: *Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD.*

12 stones set on the river bank. 12 stones to remember. A connection to traversing that *middle* of a powerful river at flood stage. What signs and tangible things help anchor us to God's promises of love and healing, and to God's power to transform the danger?

There are simple things that help me remember and feel more anchored in God's love – candles, sunlight and moonlight, the bread and the cup, maybe even the many rocks I've collected. And yet, it's really the people--all across my history who are also on the journey--that help me navigate in the middle of the fast-moving river. I was recently reminded of this as I've re-connected with some significant people from my early 20s who helped me to know and to stand in God's love. And, I give thanks for all of you in the Luther Place family who are part of that now. We go into *the middle* together.

Friday, March 29, 2019 – Xavier Williamson

Readings: Joshua 4:14-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-15; Psalm 32

²³ For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴ He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.” – Joshua 4:23-24

Lord Jesus it says in your word, examine yourself to see if you are in the faith – Lord I realize that this is not talking to unbelievers but to all of us who are your children, in Christ Jesus. Lord help me to examine myself, and all that I am, and all that I am learning from You and Your word, so that I truly may say with conviction, I know in Whom I have believed and am walking in the path on which He has placed me.

Shift my mind from critical thoughts of others, and prevent me Lord, from having a spirit of control – or by pretending to hold others accountable to You when the beam in my own eye is greater than the speck that is in my brothers’ eyes.

Keep me humble before Your throne of grace as I walk the way of the cross day by day - with the Spirit as my teacher and the Word of God washing me clean. Keep me close to You in the days that lie ahead, in Jesus name I pray,

Amen

Saturday, March 30, 2019 – Nicole Gonzalez

Readings: Exodus 32:7-14; Luke 15:1-10; Psalm 32

It's easy to pick out the corruption that happens in our world today. Across our country and the globe, injustices occur everyday, and even within ourselves we find deceit and sin. Surely we are prone to wander away from God when it often feels like we can't even see God through the pain and suffering. But our texts today remind us that wandering and pain is not the end of the story.

In Luke, Jesus tells his disciples these two well known parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin (later followed by the lost son). These stories have many essential things in common, but by far my favorite is the rejoicing. At the conclusion of each tale, after searching for and finding their lost possessions, both the shepherd and the woman call to their friends and neighbors to share in celebration: "Rejoice with me! I have found what was lost."

I often struggle with the hardships and darkness that exist in the world. The corruption and the idolatry that persists, as it did in Moses day with the Israelites and the golden calf, have every right to make God angry. But again, this is not the end of the story. Moses intercedes and reminds God of the promises he made to His people.

And now it is Jesus who intercedes for us. With the ultimate demonstration of love and sacrifice, pain and suffering never get the last word. When we show resilience and faithfulness, when we come together as the Church and share God's love and light, there is rejoicing! And the rejoicing is shared in the entire community of God's children. Looking to this joy of true love, forgiveness, and grace, you will no longer be found in the darkness, but instead in the arms of Christ. Let the Shepherd carry you back home on his shoulders.

Our Heavenly Shepherd, help us be resilient in the face of trials and injustices. Root us in your faithfulness and love so that we can truly celebrate together in your abundant good works in the world. Amen

Sunday, March 31, 2019 – Michael Sonnenburg

Readings: Joshua 5:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32; Psalm 32 (11)

What Would Jesus Do?

Simply answer: Jesus would love, welcome and affirm all no matter what.

In Luke 15: 1-2, it is written: “Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming to near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” Yes, Jesus welcomes in those who are sinners and breaks bread with them. How often do we pass by those who are different than us or scoff at the idea of inviting someone to dinner? We are all sinners and yet we often hold ourselves on a higher pedestal than others. Those with the least to offer, often offer the most. Those with the most, often offer the least. Jesus would give what he had so that others may eat. Jesus would give what he had so others would be clothed. Jesus would not talk about someone behind their back. Jesus would be gracious about someone’s differences and accept them, unconditionally, just as he gave himself to die on the cross for each of us unconditionally.

Monday, April 1, 2019 – Catherine Kimball-Eayrs

Readings: Leviticus 23:26-41; Revelation 19:1-8; Psalm 53

Both of our readings for today talk about different forms of celebration. In the reading from Leviticus, we are educated about the different days of Sabbath, atonement and festivals and how they should be set apart and celebrated. In Revelation, we are brought to understand that a judgement has occurred and there is a celebration of the power and glory of our Lord. As I read these passages, and thought about our theme of resilience for Lent, I thought about how even in some of the most stressful times of my life, being able to celebrate and laugh, is what made all the difference. During my deployment to Iraq from 2006 to 2007, there were more than enough hard times and, without resiliency, could have been a truly devastating time of my life. But I was particularly blessed to be surrounded by so many who were able to find humor, and celebrate life, even at times when it seemed the hardest. One evening, we were huddled in our cement bunkers waiting for the all clear after another attack on our base. We had been waiting in the dark for a while, when I heard the voice of one of my soldiers. “They better not have hit the Easter Bunny....cause I really need some chocolate now!” We all laughed and the stress level dropped....palpably. This humor that came out of the darkness was just a reminder to me of the reality that resilience is about finding ways to find the joy (and humor) and to celebrate. These readings in Leviticus and Revelation teach us about celebration – and resilience reminds us to celebrate at ALL times.

Lord, I ask you for the ability to find humor and joy even during the times when they seem the furthest away. May each day be a demonstration of our resilience and ability to celebrate You. Amen.

Tuesday, April 2, 2019 – Mark Hindin

Readings: Leviticus 25:1-19; Revelation 19:9-10; Psalm 53

Leviticus is that boring book full of lists and harsh irrelevant rules; the place where my resolve to read through the entire Bible has often been becalmed; but right there in Chapter 25, is an astounding prescription for a resilient society. There God instructs that every seven years the land gets a rest; and every 50th year is a Jubilee. A reset button gets pushed. Slaves are freed, debts forgiven, and land reverts to the original owners. Entrenched wealth and privilege are erased; the effects of injustice eased. Alas, there is no clear evidence that the Israelites ever actually observed the Jubilee year and the prophets tell us that entrenched injustice was a (the?) major reason for God's displeasure and the fall of the ancient Jewish Kingdoms.

Several thousand years later I can imagine what a modern Jubilee Year would look like and it scares me. I'm all for a Jubilee Year for the one percent, but resistant to seeing my own privilege, much less doing much about it. I know that doing something about it could be uncomfortable but necessary and exhilarating.

Prayer: Trusting in Your love, help us to acknowledge privilege and injustice and empower us to do the work You've called us to do in healing our land and society.

Wednesday, April 3, 2019 – Chris Nichols

Readings: 2 Kings 4:1-7; Luke 9: 10-17; Psalm 53

2 Kings 4:1-7 Elisha delivers the widow from slavery and debt with stores of oil

Luke 9: 10-17 Jesus feeds the 5,000 (men, plus all their wives and children who are left out of the count, so probably more like 20,000)

Psalm 53 A lamentation on human corruption

Asking for Abundance

Loneliness has now been officially recognized as a modern disease, a sister plague to anxiety, a systemic catalyst for ‘pain’ medications that first enslave the body then the mind. Since 1999, pain, loneliness and self-medication led more than 700,000 Americans to die from drug overdoses - nearly twice the fatalities suffered in WWII, and more than 12 times as many deaths as American suffered in the Vietnam War – *not counting deaths related to alcohol*. We medicate against the pain of loneliness. We suffer, alone.

We were not meant to suffer, because we are never truly alone. God is always and forever surrounding us. “Fools say in their hearts,” claims the Psalmist, “There is no God.” The relational God walks with us, waiting for us to ask, just ask, for what we need. Sometimes God demonstrates cosmic abundance with high drama – producing food for 20,000 hungry people from a kid’s bag lunch. Making an artesian well out of the widow’s tiny oil jug. For myself, God seems to shore up small works of resilience against daily evil, Her quiet constancy a throbbing “YES” against the thousand cuts of “no” coming from the world.

This revelation smacked me in the head at the lowest point of self-doubt, after months of unemployment. Pacing in my house, dry of inspiration, anxious, crippled by shame. “God!” (we talked a lot, out loud.) “This is stupid! Who else can I call? What else should I do?” Gently, God answered that “I” should get over “myself.” Asking for help – accepting help! – tapped into God’s strength when my own failed.

Lightning bolt.

Friends, family, colleagues – extensions of God’s abundance – were waiting to connect. How could we help each other? Where and what could I contribute, setting ego aside? How could I begin to think in “us” terms? Joint projects became healing successes. Gradually, we all helped each other. Learning to start over, a servant with beginner mind, helps me to ask every day: “God – What joy will your abundance reveal?”

- Chris Nichols

Excerpts that could be used to fill in gaps throughout the 2019 Lenten guide:

Of the heavenly things God has shone me, I can speak but a little word, not more than a honeybee can carry away on its foot from an overflowing jar.

- Meebtild of Magdeburg

If there existed a single sense for the words of the scripture, then the first commentator who came along would discover it and other hearers would experience neither the labor of searching, nor the joy of finding.

- Ephrem the Syrian

Thursday, April 4, 2019 – Chelsey Christensen

Readings: Isaiah 43:1-7; Philippians 2:19-24; Psalm 126

"Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy..."

I had the great pleasure of knowing and loving Alberta Williams.

We served alongside one another on Luther Place's church council and co-led the Membership Team during that time. She was a resilient, powerful, and candid woman. Her brutal, beautiful candor would often elicit laughter - and occasionally shocked silence - in our council meetings. Her past was marred by things too ugly to repeat - abuse, trauma, addiction, violence - and yet, she readily and willingly shared her story for the benefit of others and even more amazingly, managed to remain a presence of great joy. Her love of God was simple and deep.

On Sunday, February 24, we celebrated the life of Alberta Williams. A life lived fully and faithfully but cut short by cancer's grasp. I had the honor of serving as greeter/usher for her funeral and was in awe - though not surprised - by the hundreds of attendees who arrived to celebrate Alberta's life. Her life was sown in trials, tribulations, and tears but she has most surely gone home with shouts of joy. And, if we needed any convincing, the tiara that sat upon Ms. Alberta's head as we said our final farewells really made that abundantly clear. Even in death, Alberta exuded joy and brought joy to others. I am so grateful to have been a small part of Alberta's amazing life. May we all be blessed with an iota of her resilience and come home with such shouts of joy.

Amen.

Friday, April 5, 2019 – Eric Gardener

Readings: Isaiah 43:8-15; Philippians 2:25-3:1; Psalm 126

Life brings happiness and difficulty without fail. Some people would say this is what defines us as human. When facing tough situations that challenge us as individuals to our core, we often long for those times that previously brought us the greatest joy and free of stress.

We frequently compare ourselves to others who we perceive as having the one item we do not have. In today's society, noise and distractions surround us each and every day that often contribute to our perception of difficulties whether it is overt or subtle.

When challenged, we will often seek the solutions that chase temporary relief. When we follow these individuals or activities, we will be lead astray with by the claims of others who think they know what is best to solve our difficulties. These individuals may seek to benefit themselves at your expense with solutions that are often equivalent to snake oil.

The truth is simple when facing adversity. You and I are chosen by the one true God. Regardless of how you perceive the difficulty you encounter, God has saved you and will continue to protect you from what really matters. God has always protected you and will continue to do so in perpetuity if you allow him/her to do so thru your faith. God has mercy on us and knows what is best for you and me.

This is easy to proclaim when everything goes the way you and I had intended but will be challenged when we forget to believe. There will be a time where we will find ourselves listening to the noise and chasing temporary relief. This distraction may cause us to lose sight of what is important and will test our resilience.

When we feel overwhelmed and the noise is just too much, we should refocus on the fact that God protects us because of his/her love for us. Whether it is sorrow, pain or another negative human emotion, you and I need to remind ourselves that it will pass because of God's eternal love.

Rather than focusing on those things that distract us from serving God, we should remember to laugh, be joyful, sing, dance, and remember what God has already given us. This is what allows us to be closer to God. Rejoice in the love and mercy God provides us.

Prayer: Dear God, please help me be more resilient and remind me to focus on those things that are really important. Please assist me in discarding the distractions that prevent me from being closer to you allowing me to serve you better. Amen.

Saturday, April 6, 2019 – Faith Korbel

Readings: Exodus 12:21-27; John 11:45-57; Psalm 126

This passage from John comes directly after Jesus performs one of his most amazing miracles – raising Lazarus from the dead. It's already a tense time politically, as Jesus has become more and more known, bringing fear to those who hold the power. A miracle of this magnitude (and the attention that comes with it), along with Jesus' radical teachings, threaten everything for the individuals who have benefitted from the way the power structure has been working up to this point. They are desperate to find a way to hold that power, and this is their chance.

I've lived through 39 Lents so far, so I'm familiar with the crucifixion story and have heard this reading from John many times. Upon reading it in preparation for writing this devotion, one phrase gave me pause: *45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.*

I'm a rule follower. Conflict/shaking things up/getting in trouble – these things make me VERY uncomfortable, and always have. So, where does that leave me in this story? Had I witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus, would I have believed and followed, defying the “management”, or would I have run to the Pharisees and turned him in for breaking rules?

We live in messy time politically, and this same dilemma exists. If I see those in power doing things that I consider an affront to my beliefs, do I speak out or do I follow the rules and do what I am told? I like to think that I would speak out, just as I would have been faithful to Jesus....but, would I? Do I? Have I? Do you?

Dear Lord, Help us to see the rules that need to be broken and give us the strength to break them.

Sunday, April 7, 2019 – Kathryn Perry

Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8; Psalm 126 (5)

“Thus says the LORD, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth . . . for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.”

Before Passion Sunday, there is a resurrection: Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary is raised from the dead by his friend, Jesus. This not a new thing since the daughter of Jairus was raised earlier in Jesus’ ministry. The new thing is redemption given us through the death of Jesus: proof of his mortality that makes his resurrection an even more powerful event. As Lent draws to its close, it is a time to reflect on how we can extend the giving of ourselves our time, and our love to all we meet everyday.

Monday, April 8, 2019 – Anne-Claire Kasten

Readings: Exodus 40:1-15; Hebrews 10:19-25; Psalm 20

In the last chapter of Exodus, the Lord explicitly tells Moses how to “Set up the tabernacle, the tent of meeting.” Every item in the tent, from the table to the lamps and from the burnt offering to the basin, has a specific place. Moses also receives instructions for how to anoint Aaron and his sons into the priesthood, as God explains how they are to be washed and clothed once the tabernacle is ready.

The teacher in me responded to this passage by thinking of my work in setting up my classroom space. In many educational circles, the classroom is often viewed as the “third teacher,” meaning that, with thoughtful arrangement, students’ learning spaces can be designed to engage and empower them on their learning journey without a constant need for teacher direction. For my young Second Graders, this might mean creating systems in the classroom that help them develop routines that foster their growing executive functioning skills--the skills they’ll rely on as they continue in school, and indeed, in life in general.

In this season of Lent, I wonder if this scripture might serve as a reminder that when we take the time to prepare our minds and spirits in a thoughtful and deliberate way, perhaps we enable ourselves to better listen to God whenever or wherever God speaks to us. If our life is cluttered with the usual everyday worries, we may find it difficult to stop and listen. When we seek to organize our lives around God, we become more resilient to our stressors, opening up the learning space for how to follow Christ.

“Dear God, Show me the ways to set up the tent of meeting with you. Help me to seek and see opportunities to listen to your Word and be in Christian fellowship with my community. Amen.”

Tuesday, April 9, 2019 – Chris Peterson

Readings: Judges 9:7-15; 1 John 2:18-28; Psalm 20

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! (Psalm 20)

Except . . . he usually doesn't. That doesn't mean he's not there. How many times have we fallen to our knees, desperately praying God deliver us from anything from being caught in a white lie to money problems to loneliness to, like Jesus in Gethsemane, something literally threatening our lives or the lives of those we love, only to be met with silence? Times like those, the well wishes of the psalmist can seem like naïve—even cruel—jokes. We live a challenging faith that asks us to maintain belief amid evidence to the contrary. We have to find a way to be okay with the idea that we might never get the final full reveal God gave to Job or Jonah, or the given to the Apostles at Pentecost. But just as God reminded Job, Jesus assured the Apostles, and the psalmist says to us, God is with us always no matter what misfortunes befall us or how stormy the seas get. With God, the long-term outcome of suffering is always hope. Always.

Wednesday, April 10, 2019 – Jay Forth

Readings: Habakkuk 3:2-15; Luke 18:31-34; Psalm 20

“Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.’ But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.”

After Jesus explained to his disciples their upcoming journey to Jerusalem and his impending suffering, the disciples stood there with blank faces. The passage states that “[the disciples] understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” Even though we might have heard the Gospel events many times, for the first disciples this was a strange story. Why would these things happen? What was Jesus planning? What would happen to them?

From our perspective, it is possible to accuse the disciples of being dimwitted and cowardly. However, in the midst of their all too human behavior, the disciples exhibited courageous solidarity. Jesus’ ominous words spoke of the suffering he would undergo. And yet, the disciples moved forward with Jesus toward an uncertain future. Despite their failings aside, the disciples’ step toward the unknown alongside one who would suffer is an act of faith.

In our own difficult times, the future is not always clear. We live among people who are vulnerable to violence, imprisonment, and death. And, despite our best efforts, we cannot know for certain what to do, what will happen, or how much we all stand to lose. Nonetheless, instead of shrinking from the unknown, may we have the faith to travel with Jesus toward Jerusalem and with those among us toward struggle, and, prayerfully, liberation.

Loving God, give us the faith to walk the difficult and uncertain road with those who struggle. Grant us the courage to remain alongside those who have so much to lose; to journey toward hope and resurrection. Amen.

Thursday, April 11, 2019 – Peggy Rainwater

Readings: Isaiah 53: 10-12; Hebrews 2: 1-9; Psalm 31: 9-16

“You crowned them with glory and honor. And put everything under their feet....God left nothing that is not subject to them.” Hebrews

The earth, the streams, plants, animals and other living beings, other humans. All this and more are related to us. They are ours to enjoy or to abuse.

We can create a society that appreciates all people and things around us. Or we can neglect and ignore them.

We can encourage research into ways to protect the air and the rivers, and then pay attention to that research or we can neglect the earth around us and pollute and destroy by our carelessness.

We can create societies that have boundaries on behavior to protect all individuals and give them basic rights to exist freely or we can draw lines between people giving privilege to the powerful.

We can have a country that celebrates the strengths of its people by welcoming all who wish to join and participate or we can create a country that walls off inhabitants by keeping out those who are different.

When we realize that God crowned us with honor and glory, the sweetness of life becomes apparent. We gain courage to protect the earth and its creatures.

“At present we do not see everything subject to them. But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” Hebrews

This gives us strength.

Dear Lord,

“Let your face shine on your servant;

Save me in your unfailing love.”

Give us strength to speak out and fight for a society that protects the rights of people and enhances their lives. Give us knowledge to protect the Earth. Give us soft hearts and strong wills

Amen

Friday, April 12, 2019 – Amanda Lindamood

Readings: Isaiah 54: 9-10; Hebrews 2: 10-18; Psalm 31: 9-16

“Didn’t I conquer this, last year. **Tell me what I missed**, because I feel that it’s coming back up again. Must be something I ate, some song, some show, some hate. **The devil wants to extend the game**, free throws, and when it ends, he wants to make, the sequel, because if he has another chance, he feels like he can take, my joy, my peace, my faith. **See the devil, he learns from your mistakes, even if you don’t**, that’s how he keeps you in cycles, cycles, cycles, but I’m not going in cycles, cycles.” - Cycles by Jonathan McReynolds

At my dad’s funeral, the pastor used a metaphor about travel in his sermon. I was six, but it made sense to me then as it does now. He described a sense that my family had planned a vacation, and gotten on a plane to Italy, yet when we got off, we found ourselves instead in Holland. It wasn’t beautiful for the reasons we were excited about traveling to Italy for, but we would find our bearings and discover beauty anyway, just maybe not in the same ways or for the same reasons.

That Pastor followed his sense of call and moved away from my church before my dad died, but he accompanied my family while my dad was sick and under hospice care. His metaphor was from a place of knowing my dad and my family very well, but it also wasn’t an attempt to smooth over the disruption.

Years later when I was a senior in high school, a mentor of mine wrote in a card, “I hope that as you leave from here you know God more than you know about God”. Her prayer for me was one of personalization, and a rooted relationship. In Young Life when you apply to be involved in their ministry, you first spend a year in discernment. Throughout that discernment you collect ministry ideas, the first of which is, “you cannot forget that this is a relational ministry”. Not said in these words, but this is an articulation of the temptation to lose sight of your motivation for being there, and in so doing lose sense of what **there** referred to.

I started this devotion by typing the first verse of a song entitled Cycles. In thinking about temptation, there’s a monotony and a reoccurrence, manifesting as disillusionment. When treated as short lived, the nature of temptation as perpetual is obscured, probably because there is a humanity in needing to know an end is coming. Scripture and hymns are filled with images of dawns breaking and seas being parted and what was heavy being made light, and yet when binds us and tempts us and moves with us as loss is too often chronic. Perhaps feeling more like a cycle, or Deja Vu, or one unbroken day in a place you didn’t set out to travel to.

I think one of the things we’re being asked to struggle with in our spiritual lives is our ability to receive comfort from God amidst long suffering, and to ground ourselves with an openness to seeing our own patterns and tunnel vision. To receive an expansion of the metaphors we use for Jesus as fully human, speaking in greater specificity about the ways we struggle with temptation. To receive a narrowing for God the sustainer compared to God the fixer or the punisher or even

God the parent and protector. We journey toward Holy Week and hear how we are holy, when what I think we need to hear too is that we are human. Humanly violent, humanly forgetful, humanly cyclical, humanly burnt out, humanly numb.

“To me this is like the days of Noah”, our passage from Isaiah starts. Full of promises, full of covenants, full of floods, and not yet peaceful. In the not yet, we still have time to learn what we haven’t learned. To act with urgency, and remorse. To cry and be comforted, and to cry because nothing comforts us. To not take for granted that we aren’t left alone in our suffering, and to remember the clarity that grief allows. The clarity that brings submission, and repentance, and here again a looming crucifixion.

Saturday, April 13, 2019 – Bertha F.

Readings: Leviticus 23:1-8; Luke 22:1-13; Psalm 31: 9-16

Reflection on Leviticus 23:1-8, Psalm 31:9-16, and Luke 22:1-13 As I read the three passages I was given I could not see how they related to the problems we were asked to address. Upon reflection of these readings, I found the common thread to each was the undying faith and belief of each individual. Our Nation was founded on the Faith of our Fathers, and it seems that our Faith has been eroded by man and material things. We are powerless to meet the needs of others until we find a way, through God, to regenerate our own belief. How can we meet the needs of others when our hearts are filled with doubt and we are searching for ways to meet our own needs? Our God is still among us and will guide us to do His bidding if only we will open our hearts and seek to do His will.

Prayer:

Lord we are thankful for the many gifts received from thee. As we go through each day may we be aware of the needs of others and open our hearts and trust God to show us the way to meet these needs. Amen.

Sunday, April 14, 2019 – Jackson Droney

Readings: Luke 19:28-40; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14 - 23:56 or Luke 23:1-49; Psalm 31: 9-16

I think sometimes these days it can be hard to believe good things can happen. Every day it seems there is a torrent of bad or depressing news. Violence, betrayal, deceit, disaster . . . it all adds up and can feel paralyzing. Why bother being gracious when so many selfish people appear to do so well? Why bother following the rules when we see people break them with no apparent consequence? Why act with humility in a “hooray-for-me” culture?

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, it was the best news story in awhile. He rode a donkey and people cheered with joy as he passed. And while the crowd thought he would bring a political freedom, he was in fact bringing a more powerful kind. The freedom we experience in Christ liberates us from all the bad news and hardships of life. It breaks their hold over us.

We still face injustice and setbacks, disappointments and mistakes. But when we humble ourselves as Jesus humbled himself, when we serve as Jesus served, and when we trust in God the way Jesus did . . . we discover a joy that transcends all the bad news of our day. A joy that will make “the stones cry out.

Gracious God, may we receive the joy you offer and may our lives radiate your freedom through acts of service and humility.

Monday, April 15, 2019 – Quentin B.

Readings: Isaiah 42:1-9; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11; Psalm 36:5-11 (7)

The American Baptist Church's identity campaign uses the tag line, "Serving as the hands and feet of Christ." The prophet just about said it thousands of years ago, "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." (Isaiah 42:6-7) We're called by God. That's our discipleship. Furthermore, we're called to be actively engaged in the world. Going to church every Sunday is not enough anymore. We're given as a covenant to the people. God calls us to serve in the world. This call makes no exceptions. Where are the young adults? Where are the children? They want to make this world a better place. They don't want to come on Sundays to get their ticket punched. They really want to be the hands and feet of Christ.

Prayer:

You called us, O God, to be your instruments of peace and justice. Help us to find the courage to risk being your hands and feet. Open us to being a church whose outreach truly reaches out to be a light to the nations, open eyes that are blind, and release the prisoner from the dungeon. Amen.

Tuesday, April 16, 2019 – Eddy Ameen

Readings: Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36; Psalm 71:1-14 (6)

I attended a Quaker school from grades 7 to 12 and once a week, we had all-school Quaker meetings. Our teachers guided us to “wait for the light of God to pass through us” before getting up to share a reflection with others during these unstructured gatherings. I don’t think I got up to speak once in all those years. I wanted to – and often rehearsed in my mind something I wanted to say – but I was so confused by what it meant to wait for the light. How would I know it had passed through me? What signal was I to look for, and how could I beckon it? It felt like a high burden for someone who thought they had great things to say. Despite this, I found meetings deeply enriching in my adolescent development. They offered me time to center myself in community with others; they provided me an unhurried delight of taking hold of what a friend or faculty member shared, letting it pass over the pools and valleys of my thoughts.

As a Lutheran in adulthood, I see now that not speaking in those Quaker meetings showed me the wisdom in silence. Silence as an adult in a busy world is so welcome. At the same time, I see now that the light of God has always been within me. I do not need to be a passive bystander waiting for that light to appear. If the light feels dim – If I feel ashamed or doubtful, for example – I can choose to walk further and deeper in my faith, and restore some of that brightness.

May the period of Lent when we praise Jesus and serve as Jesus has, be filled with silence, and also with light, even on the darkest day.

Oh God, may you offer each of us in Luther Place and around the world a glimpse of our own bright, grace-filled light that you gave to us, and which we can discover by faithfully walking in the path of Jesus Christ. It is on this path we are always and evermore at home as your children.

Wednesday, April 17, 2019 – Pastor Karen Brau

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32; Psalm 70 (1)

Through these Lenten Days, I wonder if God has given you the tongue of a teacher (Isaiah 58: 1-12)?

What can you share with another person about resilience?

Where have you opened to God in this season?

And have you held on to your faith even when it's been challenged?

How has God helped you cultivate resilience this Lent? Please be specific.

May we continue to be resilient in our communal faith as a congregation— and we ask that you, Oh Loving God, continue to be the resurrection in our world.

Let us pray:

We give you thanks God, for your help that has come to us in ordinary and surprising ways. You have led and guided us and have invited us to again offer all the gaps in our life to you. We thank you for working in our congregation and for bring us together. May we anticipate the power of your teachings through Holy Week. Help us to believe in the resurrection. Amen.