

**February 26th**

**Pastor Karen**

**Readings: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Psalm 51:1-17(1)**

Lent is a 40 day journey, not including Sundays, and that can feel like a long and laborious journey — especially as we find each day there is a new struggle in our global village, and often in our individual lives. The prophet Joel writes about difficult days, and they probably understand the sentiment of just making it through.

I had a rich conversation with a young adult about a theater production they are part of. The play material is dynamic and difficult, and they commented on how they noticed the cast and crew changing over time as they “lived” with the play. That phrase, “Lived the play”, stuck with me. While the Prophet Joel, in the 2nd Chapter, offers a picture of difficulty and despair, the prophet also issues an invitation to turn to the Lord our God, telling us that God is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. Joel serves a God who invites us to imagine that God is present, even in what seems impossible nighttime situations — and the prophet has faith that the mystery of God continues to be present and among us wherever we are on our journey.

We have an invitation to imagine ourselves Living with Lent, as we learn to walk in the night. And there is a chance that this may be a 40 day journey that changes us as individuals and as a community. Take note of your days and your nights. Make time to ask God to show up and take time to observe how that happens. Live with Lent — and may your journey, and our journey in 2020, nurture our faith teach is it teaches us about walking with God at night.

**February 27th**

**Justin Fitch**

**Readings: Jonah 3:1-10; Romans 1:1-7; Psalm 51**

In Barbara Brown Taylor’s book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, she quotes an important theologian and musician, Hildegard von Bingen: “We cannot live in a world that is interpreted for us by others. An interpreted world is not a hope. Part of the terror is to take back our own listening. To use our own voice. To see our own light.”

A crucial decision in my life had to be made after auditioning for grad school. I was accepted into the school of my choice, but the terror of the unknown and the

overwhelming voices of doubt, both internal and external, had me in such spiritual and emotional conflict, I felt as though I had to give God an ultimatum in order to know what to do. I thought my request was so much that surely I'd just stay where I was and be able to blame it on God. Clearly, I was grossly underestimating God, and so with a one-word edit to a reading from today, "The word of the Lord came to Justin saying, 'Get up, go...'" While my prayer was answered, I was still reluctant to go. There was no "warm fuzzy feeling" of confidence in my decision. Since moving here though, I've been able to start taking back my own listening. To use my own voice. And to see my own light.

*I pray for those overwhelmed by the drowning noises of this world, who feel stuck but scared to leave what they are accustomed to, that they too may begin to tune in to their own listening, voice, and light with God's help. I close with the last verse from today's NT reading, "To all God's beloved, grace to you and peace from God the Creator and our Lord Jesus Christ."*

**February 28th**

**Judy Floy**

**Readings: Jonah 4:1-11; Romans 1:8-17; Psalm 51**

*Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade waiting to see what would become of the city. Jonah 4:5*

Walk in the dark? Well, what can be darker than living the belly of a big fish for three days!

Darkness certainly means physically without light. Barbara Brown Taylor talks about the "Treasures of Darkness" and gives examples such as emotionally grim times, mental challenges, relationship changes, chronic illness, doubts of faith, and politically persecution.

The story of Jonah may be literal or figurative. No matter what, there was plenty of darkness. How did Jonah respond when the darkness was removed? When the fish spewed Jonah onto the beach, did he immediately jump up and down for joy? Did he charge off to be an inspirational speaker with a perpetual peppy smile?

No. When things didn't go the way Jonah expected, he got mad at God. and built a shack (booth) to sit and pout.

What lesson can we take when we emerge from darkness? A light switch can immediately cure the physical darkness. However, not all cures are so instantaneous. We can expect to struggle, to backslide, or to long for former times. Maybe we just need to retreat away like Jonah to figure stuff out.

As good neighbors, we can strive to help our neighbors emerge from darkness as well. Hug the lonely. Call the grieving. Write to the prisoner. Say hello to people on the street. Visit the elders. Advocate for the weak.

When we emerge from darkness remember to ask God for a willing spirit. Jonah was not instantly joyful. Emerging takes awhile. Emerging takes faith. Emerging takes patience.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain me in a willing spirit. Amen (Psalm 51 : 10-11).*

**February 29th**

**Rosemary Winslow**

**Readings: Isaiah 51:1-12; Romans 1:8-17; Psalm 51**

Last night I attended the opening performance of James Baldwin's 1954 play, *The Amen Corner*, at the Shakespeare Theater at 6th and F Streets, NW. Baldwin wrote novels and plays, and he is thought by many to be the greatest essayist of the American Twentieth Century. In this play, Baldwin explores the question, *What is God's Truth?* He invokes Isaiah 58, with that text's expression of the uselessness of sheer displays of religiosity. The main character, Margaret, is a preacher in Harlem who encourages these and more beliefs and actions that are not in line with Truth. In the end, she realizes what God really wants--for each of us to love all of God's children. Baldwin knew the Bible by heart. He was himself a preacher in his adolescence, and like the preacher's son in *The Amen Corner*, he saw through the materialization, the external shows of religion, and left preaching to become a writer who explored individual and societal fear, and the ways the heart became confined by fear.

As it happened, I had been pondering Isaiah 58 in preparation to write this piece, and as it happened, the Old Testament reading for Sunday last was the same. Isaiah presents fasting as a synecdoche for the kind of righteousness God does not want. What

he says God wants is love duty, and devotion expressed humbly in social justice action---not public displays of fasting but freeing the oppressed, working for justice, feeding, housing, and clothing the homeless.

As the people of Luther Place know well, this injunction for hospitable action is echoed and expanded by Jesus in Matthew 25---the seven acts of mercy to the stranger: whoever gives to another in need gives to Christ, for the stranger is Christ. This giving is how to enter Heaven, Jesus explains. In Isaiah's terms, this is how one is bound back to God, this is how the bonds of devotion to the community are restored. This is how, in Isaiah's terms, grace will “shine on you like the morning sun.”

Matthew 18 gives us the way to devoted action. The disciples ask Jesus: “Who is really the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Drawing a little child to him, the Master answers: “Believe me, unless you change your whole outlook and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (J.B. Phillips translation).

What might this mean, to be humble as a little child? I still ask myself this question, and over my life, I've had different answers. This is what I see since returning to Luther Place: On Sundays in church, the littlest ones wander around looking, without thought of whether they are interrupting the service or not. They are just there, absorbing. They are humble, having no sense of being greater or lesser among us, safe in the gathering's embrace. They are curious, they have no motivation of status or righteousness. They are completely open to learning.

A little one runs fast, holding a collection plate in outstretched arms toward the altar, a bearer of wonder and awe, of a simple, “Here I am.” A little girl toddles up to Pastor Karen and hugs her legs. To me, this is the way to enter the “new outlook,” this is a helpful motivation. Now, consider what humble is to you at this time in your life, in this season.

As we prepare for the Passion and Easter, the Psalmist, fresh from his chastisement by Nathan for his extreme failure of devotion to Bathsheba's husband, reminds us to make our sacrifice be a humble spirit and a changed outlook. It would be so much easier, wouldn't it, to give up sweets for Lent. But that won't give us the wonder of divine work in us, the sweetness of heart, mind, and spirit, the peace and joy of Easter that is already here and walking with us through our dark.

*Lord of Love, as we prepare for the Passion and Easter, guide us as we walk through this season together, thoughtfully and heartfully aware and of and devoted to our own and our neighbors' needs.*

### **March 2nd**

**Susan Boyle**

**Readings: 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18; Psalm 32**

I recently visited San Diego and experienced an extraordinary sunset over the Pacific Ocean. Folks from the neighborhood gathered at a small park with their children and dogs. Neighbors and tourists chatted and watched the sea birds and surfers. A cool steady wind ruffled my hair, and I pulled my jacket close. It seemed like the sun hung forever in the sky, and then in an instant it was gone! A flash of light blinked on the water, and almost within minutes the first stars became visible. I heard a woman whisper, "Good-night. See you tomorrow." The night is as inevitable as the day. Stars and moon may be visible; or may be covered by clouds. We hold fast that God is in the darkness, that God feels our breath and pounding heart and our whispers about tomorrow.

Tonight I pray from Psalm 32:  
*"Therefore let all who are fearful  
offer prayer to you,  
at a time of distress, the rush of  
mighty waters  
shall not reach them.  
Amen*

### **March 3rd**

**Mary Virginia Abe**

**Readings: Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 4:14-5:10; Psalm 32**

Genesis 4 is the story of Cain and Abel. Both born after sin entered this world, the two brothers were probably told about the sin of their parents and how to avoid the penalty of sin. However, as these boys grow up they each chose their own particular path. One day each boy, now grown men, brought an offering to God. Cain brought the very best of what the ground produced but God did not accept his offering and poor Cain got very, very, angry--so angry that he decided HE just had to do something. Abel

also brought an offering: the firstborn from his flocks, and God accepted Abel's offering. Cain's anger turned to hatred of his brother Abel and Cain decided to do something about it. One day when Abel and Cain were together in the field, Cain got his revenge--he killed Abel.

Suddenly God appeared and began talking with Cain and poor Cain tried to justify himself. But God did not accept this justification. Cain was thrown out to wander the earth with no place to settle down and call home. God set a special mark on Cain so that no one would kill him. What mark did God put on Cain? I don't know.

Fast forward many millennium to Hebrews 4 in the New Testament, where we read that now we have a high priest in heaven interceding for us. Okay, let me give some background. Jesus was born and lived here on earth and His human life ended when He died on the cross. Now we no longer needed a human high priest to intercede for us. Jesus has died but Jesus rose again to be our high priest and to be in heaven as our Advocate. Jesus knows our fears, our hopes, our wants, our desires because he too was human. Who better to be an Advocate than a person who was like us. What an awesome thought!!

In Psalm 32, David is praising God for forgiveness of his sins because David was willing to ask God to forgive him. David knew the heights that he could climb because he is forgiven. David could say that God is his hiding place and that God would shelter David in David's time of trouble. How could David make this claim? Because David kept himself close to God for God to comfort him.

Yes, some of us choose the wrong just like Cain whereas others choose the right. However I will not leave you in despair. Even though we may choose the wrong, each one of us can choose the right. Each one makes his own choice.

*Thank God each one can choose the right.*

**March 4th**

**Vanesa Browne**

**Readings: Exodus 34:1-9; 27-28; Matthew 18:10-14; Psalm 32**

## Talking to God at All Times

Talk therapy has been a regular part of my life for the past nine years. Every two weeks, I use my lunch hour to see my counselor. For those 50 minutes, I am completely selfish. I vent, cry, or laugh about whatever is on my mind. I unabashedly talk about myself the entire time – my relationship with my in-laws, my struggles with infertility, and my evolving friendships.

While I go into the 50 minutes feeling guilty for taking this time for myself, I leave feeling like a weight has been lifted from me, and that I can be a better wife, daughter, sister, and friend. I feel heard and validated, and often receive insights or recommendations on what I can do to navigate my circumstances better. I am a huge advocate for talk therapy and frequently find myself recommending it to friends who are struggling with a certain season of their lives.

But, as much as I advocate for talk therapy as part of everyone's mental health, I fully understand that medical professionals are not our only counselors. The first and greatest counselor has always been God. In today's Psalm, David tells us how he once "kept silen[t]" and watched his body waste away. Then, he spoke with God, acknowledging his sin and offering prayers to Him. This conversation created a safe space for David and opened the door to God's instructions for him.

God wants to be our counselor in our day times and night times – our times of joy and our times of struggle. He wants us to vent, cry, and laugh with Him as we do with our family, friends, and earthly counselors. Through these conversations with Him, we create a space for God to not only hear us, but to respond to us with His love, kindness, and wisdom. Join me, today, in turning to our heavenly counselor and unabashedly sharing our feelings with Him – whatever they may be – opening the door to His response.

## **March 5th**

**Sarah Bagge**

**Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7; Psalm 121**

Isaiah asks his listeners to reflect on the “quarry from which you were dug” in the story of Sarah and Abraham. Sarah and Abraham didn’t get the child promised to them until very late in their lives. They spent years wondering if the promise was real and taking matters into their own hands.

It can be tempting to think of those years of waiting - of existing in the space between the promise and its fruition - as wasted and empty. We want to skip over the dark parts and get straight to the fulfillment. But in doing so, we miss out on the transformation that happens in darkness. Sister Joan Chittister describes it this way:

*Who does not know that growth is a painful thing? It overspreads and sucks the heart out of us. It twists us from one amorphous spiritual mass to another. It shapes and reshapes until, at last, we come to full stature, to total development. It tugs us from small to larger, from broad to deep.*

I’d like to think those years of waiting moved Abraham and Sarah from broad to deep. May we welcome this growing work in our own lives, remembering that “God guards you from every evil, God guards your very life. God guards you when you leave and when you return. God guards you now, God guards you always.”

## **March 6th**

**Based on St. Ignatius Loyola’s Examen Prayer**

**Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-31; Psalm 121**

*I lift up my eyes—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.*

*Psalm 121:1-2*

Take a deep breath and center yourself. Light a candle if you’d like. Become aware of God’s presence around you. Think back on your day today.

What are you thankful for? Offer God your thanks for the joy and love you received, for an event that occurred, or for anything else that you are grateful for.

What troubled you today? What challenged you? Offer them to God.

Where did you feel joy today? Where was God today? Offer those to God, too.

Spend a few more moments with God, remembering that God is bigger than all of the good and bad in a day. Bask in the love of God.

Amen.

## **March 7th**

**Sarah Johnson**

**Isaiah 51:4-8; Luke 7:1-10; Psalm 121**

As I began reading the passage from Psalm 121 it immediately brought to my mind a song written from these verses- “Praise You in This Storm” by Casting Crowns- a staple of my early ‘00s youth group days. The chorus contains words that I often think of as we journey through Lent.

*And I'll praise you in this storm  
And I will lift my hands  
That you are who you are  
No matter where I am  
And every tear I've cried  
You hold in your hand  
You never left my side  
And though my heart is torn  
I will praise you in this storm*

“Every tear I’ve cried, you hold in your hand” stands out to me the most of these lines. It reminds me of how when I am in the midst of a struggle I tend to forget that there have been struggles before. Whether we have a scare or a struggle that is connected to our health, relationships, finances, etc., we often have an example of when we’ve made it through one in the past. While circumstances and outcomes may be different, it is comforting and reassuring to take a moment and remember a time we made it through to the morning after a difficult night.

*Lord we ask to feel your presence when we are journeying through a difficult night. Give us comfort and guidance as we work to see the light of the next morning. We know you hold each tear and sorrow. Thank you for your steadfastness. Amen.*

**March 9th**

**Amanda Lindamood**

**Readings: Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 3:1-6; Psalm 128**

*Make Room* by Jonathan McReynolds

I find space for what I treasure  
I make time for what I want  
I choose my priorities and  
Jesus you're my number one.  
So, I will make room for you  
My will...you can move that over.  
My way... you can move that over.  
My ego... you can move that over.  
My plans... you can move that over.  
My schedule... you can move that over.  
My itinerary... you can move that over.  
My habits... you can move that over.  
My attitude... you can move that over.  
Whatever it is, that's not like you.  
Whatever it is, you can move it on.  
Whatever it is, if it takes your space.

Last year within our Lent theme of Resilience, I included the lyrics of another song by Jonathan McReynolds entitled "Cycles". When I thought about the refrain, "you can move that over," the image of a readying process crystallized in my prayer life. And as our reading from Hebrews describes, I "*fixed my thoughts on Jesus, **whom we acknowledge as our apostle***", as the builder, as the one we laud.

This song describes two verbs, or three rather. **Prioritizing**, and making ready. **Picking a focus**, and naming who that is to yourself continually. And a building process that includes **taking things apart**.

These readings illustrate the joining of the *one who is sent* with us who are being constructed and brought into ourselves every day. As a place, and a collective, as individual people, as those who have varied experiences and messages of who Jesus is

and was for the world. As those who ask, “*Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?*” as the Israelites have. As those who **mistrust deliverance**, and need reassurance that our journeying is not for nothing. As those uncomfortable with being changed, and being known while we’re changing. As those bitten, as those who are witnessing death, and as those given a name for choosing life.

*Lord God, you hold us in our tenderest, untold scars. You tell us, and show us--as often as we need-- that trust is real. **Trust in you is real, and it is made more real with enough room.** May the room we need, and the time, the guidance, the visitors, the healing, the teachers, the hard messages, the gentle aftercare, may we learn that Jesus who was sent to us, sends us everything else along our journey. Amen.*

**March 10th**

**Mark Hindin**

**Readings: Isaiah 65:17-25; Romans 4:6-13; Psalm 128**

That great source of spiritual knowledge, Wikipedia, tells us that Isaiah may have toiled as a prophet for as long as 64 years. He wasn’t, however, one of the prophets who had a lot of opportunities to say “I told you so” or often saw the fulfillment of his prophetic words. He prophesied about the coming of a messiah that wouldn’t arrive until centuries after Isaiah’s death. His ministry was notable for calling out social injustice and oppression; for teaching that a society could not say it served God while ignoring or promoting the suffering of the vulnerable. His words still inspire, but there is little evidence that the elite of his day were moved. He portrayed a world where the unjust would be punished, but lived in a society where the unjust seemed to grow in wealth and security.

The author of Hebrews tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Isaiah’s life and words are an astounding example of that kind of faith. Decade after decade he preached with little evidence that he was being heard or his major prophecies would be fulfilled any time soon. Today’s reading prophesies an incredible future society in which someone living only a hundred years would be considered unfortunate. Even today, there’s a lot of skepticism about extending human life to that extent. We can only imagine how this idea must have

sounded in ancient Palestine. Yet Isaiah continued on sustained by the conviction of things not seen.

I sometimes wake up in the middle of the night launching prayers into the void and feeling frustrated when nothing seems to be happening. It's as if God lives on the opposite side of the universe and prayers aren't getting there. But in the morning, if I'm paying attention, I can become aware of a sense of hope and peace that doesn't come from any change in circumstances but from an assurance that God does travel across the universe and is moving in ways I cannot see. It's not news that we also live in a society where injustice, greed and hatred seem to be rewarded. But rather than despair, maybe we should spare a thought for Isaiah, and the assurance of things hoped for, though not yet seen.

### **March 11th**

**Ezekiel 36:22-32; John 7:53-8:11; Psalm 128**

*I'll give you a new heart, put a new spirit in you. I'll remove the stone heart from your body and replace it with a heart that's God-willed, not self-willed.*

Ezekiel 36:24-28 "The Message" Translation

"When my own heart started to feel bitter and judgy and hard, and when I had articulated to as fine a point as possible why I was justified in such steeliness, God finally said, 'enough.' And without anesthesia or a sterile environment, God reached in, ripped out my heart of stone, and replaced it (not for the first time) with a heart of flesh. You'd think as often as this particular procedure happens, I'd have a ziplock installed in my chest for easier access, but that's apparently not how it works"

-from Patrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint by Nadia Bolz Weber

*Loving Creator, you know that we are not always our best selves. We allow our hearts to be hardened to the people you love and the world you made. Open our hearts to those whom we may find difficult. Open our eyes so that we may see each other for what we are: beautiful creatures created in your perfect image. Amen.*

### **March 12th**

**Exodus 16:1-8; Colossians 1:15-23; Psalm 95**

**Dianne Russell**

When I have stepped into darkness the adjustment is real. In my own experience out in the country where no streetlights shine, as I experience the darkness my instinct is to grab the flashlight. And yet, if I wait --often longer than feels comfortable -- my eyes adjust to the bits of light available from stars and moon or reflections on the landscape. I slowly begin to see in a different way.

In my experiences of dark times in experiencing significant physical pain, or leading a nonprofit, or in experiencing or witnessing our systems of oppression, or in the painful loss of loved ones -- it is the same. I want the pain to go away. It takes time for my life and my vision of what is true to adjust. It takes time to see what is around me, to see the path ahead.

As the Israelites stepped into their wilderness, the dark of the night and their new reality must have been overwhelming. They left a more civilized life in Egypt. "And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Aaron and Moses in the wilderness.... for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." It took time for their eyes to adjust to the dark and to a new way of being. What is this hoar-frost flaky stuff all around us in the wilderness?

*Creator God, as we explore the mystery of being with you and with each other in the darkness, give us courage and patience, and time and space to let our eyes adjust to see what is. Help us perceive your abundant love and care for us, and, in time, translate that into sustenance for the world*

### **March 13th**

**Exodus 16:9-21; Ephesians 2:11-22; Psalm 95**

### **Liturgical Millennial**

(Liturgical Millennial is an Instagram account that writes and posts prayers for everyday situations and things, including Galentine's Day, enneagrams, and grocery shopping, as well as for secular and Christian holidays. The short prayers are often laugh-out-loud funny but also invite a moment of reflection during the routine of our day. It reminds us that God is truly in everything, and worthy of praise in all situations. --SB)

"Exhaustion"

*Jesus, you are the Son of Man, ever acquainted with our sufferings. Exhaustion and mental fatigue have covered us like a weighted blanket this day, but you know we still*

*have a ton of s\*\*\* to do. Grant us your abundant grace O God, that productivity and kindness would still somehow move through our tapped out beings. To your glory and honor. Amen.*

**March 14th**

**Tara Hogan**

**Exodus 16:27:35; John 4:1-6; Psalm 95**

*The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.*

Exodus 16:35

*O come, let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*

*For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.  
O that today you would listen to his voice!*

*Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness.*

Psalm 95:6-8

As part of the congregational discernment begun in January, some of us have been meditating on the state of liminality, which comes from the Latin word for “threshold.” Liminality describes an in-between time, where something has ended and a new thing has not yet begun. Susan Beaumont, the author of the book *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going*, gives, as a Scriptural example, the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness as a Scriptural example of liminality.

My desire is to know, and understand the whole picture of what God is doing, preferably laid out before me in a linear and organized fashion. I certainly don't want to wait 40 years for things to become clear and arrive in a new place. The story of the Israelites tells us that the people did not know they would be in the desert as long as they were; they weren't necessarily happy with Moses leading them, only to be stuck in the desert, away from a situation they knew wasn't great, but at least had the security of familiarity. And I am intrigued that God provided *manna* to sustain the Israelites

during this extended time of wandering and confusion. I am grateful for the gift of Scripture that offers me wisdom and guidance in times of wandering and uncertainty.

*What is the manna that sustains you in times of wandering?  
How are you listening to God's voice today?*

**March 16th**

**Paul Ramshaw**

**Genesis 24:1-17; 2 John 1-13; Psalm 81**

O Living One, we thank and bless you for the waters you have given us:

the water that makes up 60% of our bodies;

the water we drink and use to prepare our food;

the water we weep when sad;

the water that gives life to plants and animals and a home for fish;

the water that washes away dirt.

And we thank and bless you even more for that other water:

the water of our baptism, the water that washes away sin.

Having received that water, we have new life and will never be thirsty again. (John 4:13-14)

**March 17th**

**Sarah Johnson**

**Genesis 29:1-4; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Psalm 81**

“In your distress you called and I rescued you...” (Psalm 81:7)

This phrase caught my attention and made me think about what it looks like to be rescued by God. There are stories and jokes (the man on a roof in a flood who, in some tellings, passes up help from weather warnings, a helicopter, a canoe, etc., only to drown and have God question why he didn't take any of the help he sent) that highlight how we might not always notice the package the help arrived in. As is true for most anything, I have related that back to an episode of “The West Wing”, and this story shared to highlight that sometimes the help or rescue comes in the form of someone in our lives that has made it out of a similar darkness before:

This guy's walking down a street when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep, he can't get out. A doctor passes by, and the guy shouts up, “Hey you, can you help me out?” The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole and

moves on. Then a priest comes along, and the guy shouts up “Father, I’m down in this hole, can you help me out?” The priest writes out a prayer, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a friend walks by. “Hey Joe, it’s me, can you help me out?” And the friend jumps in the hole. Our guy says, “Are you stupid? Now we’re both down here.” The friend says, “Yeah, but I’ve been down here before, and I know the way out.

*Lord, as we continue to follow this path through Lent, we ask for the strength to seek help when we need it, and for the wisdom to see it when you’ve presented it to us in a package we might not expect. May we be able to offer our experiences in a way that can comfort and support those around us. Amen.*

**March 18th**

**Jackson Droney**

**Jeremiah 2:4-13; John 7:14-31, 37-39; Psalm 81**

Sometimes it is hard to discern what God is saying to us. We have to listen carefully - through prayer, through conversations with trusted family and friends, and through our experience in worship and in daily life. God is always beckoning us, nudging us, and inviting us. We're usually the ones praying with a lot of words to God ... but sometimes we need to silence ourselves and listen to what God is saying. This is what discernment is about, and it's not easy ... and it's fraught with the tugs and pulls of our egos, which are not to be confused with God's will or invitation. Discernment is a practice, it requires taking in the perspectives of others and reconnecting with Scripture to stay in touch with the character of God and the truth of God's longing for us and the world.

And yet ... sometimes God is quite clear. The Ten Commandments are pretty straight forward. A confirmation teacher once said to my class, "What part of 'thou shalt not' don't you understand!" In these passages we are reminded of the first commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods before me. It's pretty easy to get this one. And yet, it's just as easy to fall away. We are often pressured and pulled by capitalism, success, money, status, "the way we do things," and many other forces and temptations ... to make decisions and live our lives with other 'gods' at the center. This commandment reminds us to come back, to recenter, and resist the pull of those things

that can - if left unchallenged - lead us away from being fully alive and being part of a Beloved Community.

The moon pushes and pulls the tides. Its shape changes. It doesn't seem to look at the Earth the same way twice. While the First Commandment is clear and constant as the sun, the way we encounter it and wrestle with it is more like the moon. It varies throughout our lives. Psalm 81 refers to the celebration of the full moon and the celebration of a new moon, when the moon is not visible. Perhaps in this season of Lent we can honor the challenge of living into the first commandment. Rather than be pulled and pushed by the other forces of our world we can let the moon - whatever its shape - be our guide, our reminder of God's eternal invitation to love no matter where life takes us.

### **March 19th**

**Genevieve Dornemann**

**1 Samuel 15:10-21; Ephesians 4:25-32; Psalm 23**

Psalm 23 (Message Translation)

1-3 God, my shepherd!  
I don't need a thing.  
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,  
you find me quiet pools to drink from.  
True to your word,  
you let me catch my breath  
and send me in the right direction.

4 Even when the way goes through  
Death Valley,  
I'm not afraid  
when you walk at my side.  
Your trusty shepherd's crook  
makes me feel secure.

5 You serve me a six-course dinner  
right in front of my enemies.  
You revive my drooping head;  
my cup brims with blessing.

6 Your beauty and love chase after me

every day of my life.  
I'm back home in the house of God  
for the rest of my life.

### Finding Time to Catch your Breath

The world whirrs around us. We are surrounded by and inundated with world news, local news, the various election predictions, advertisements and statistics, updates on the decaying state of our environment, etc. Inside this busy atmosphere, we have our own lives teeming with our own stresses that can include work, family matters, social obligation, finances, health. All of these things both personal and communal can become so loud. We can lose focus, or even begin to wonder what our focus is. We just keep going, keep moving, keep running-- just try to keep up.

*But when do we breathe?*

Lent gives us a space to be. A time in the year that is here waiting for you when you find yourself panting for air. A time to refocus. In this busy life, God is walking alongside us.

Our shepherd gives us quiet pools in which we can refresh. To stop in this meadow and think. To see where the shepherd has led us, and how she is active in our journey. God is not passive, but sometimes we forget to look for God's presence and God's direction. It is hard to really observe the path when we run so quickly through it. Here, God gives us time to catch our breath.

As we are each one within the flock, the community in Lent serves as that friend that reminds you to eat and stay hydrated. God leads us to the quiet pool and the community gathers together to remind you to take a moment to reflect in it. Lent offers us a beautiful time to take a collective breath and find our center. When we are surrounded by the noise and chaos of our lives, the role of community is to provide the stillness and the silence. Together, we can remember to breathe.

Together, we look for stillness in this season where spring, cherry blossoms, and resurrection are promised around the corner.

*Oh God, my Shepherd, please help me take the time needed to breathe. When I am caught up in the business of life, guide me to see the stillness. Thank you for accompanying me along the way, even when I may not see you there. Amen.*

**March 20th**  
**Sara Babcock**

**1 Samuel 15:22-31; Ephesians 5:1-9; Psalm 23**

*I feared the people and obeyed their voice*

1 Samuel 15:24

The stories of Books 1 and 2 of Samuel depict the first kingships of Israel, with Samuel -- prophet, priest, war leader, judge -- advising them along the way. The reading today shares a glimpse from the end of the reign of Israel's first king, Saul, who has *not* been listening to what God is saying to him, by way of Samuel. Samuel takes him to task in 15:22-23, accusing Saul of being more interested in offerings than obedience -- in the *performance* of piety rather than *action*.

Saul is hardly the first (or the last) character in the Bible to find himself in this situation; getting caught up in doing what *looks right* instead of what *is right* strikes me as a very human problem. But what I find fascinating about this instance is Saul's reasoning as he repents: peer pressure. He admits that he strayed away from what God wants because he was listening more to what the people around him wanted.

And man, what a 21st-century problem. Saul feared and obeyed the voices of people in his immediate vicinity, and maybe larger communities through a representative. He didn't have social media, cable news, push notifications, Google, algorithms, or Amazon to contend with -- it's a wonder any of us can hear God at all! But we have to keep trying, right? And keep talking about it together in community -- Saul strikes me as a pretty lonely guy.

*Gracious and loving God, we know sometimes we fall short of following your way. Help us to support one another during this Lenten season and beyond as we discern your path for us as individuals and as a community, and remind us of your never-ending grace. In the name of your son Jesus we pray. Amen.*

**March 21st**

**Sarah Johnson**

**1 Samuel 15:32-34; John 1:1-9; Psalm 23**

A recent practice of mine has been to pray while doodling or coloring. Sometimes I pray about everyday things, other times I repeat a phrase or verse while I color. At a

staff meeting a couple of years ago we spoke the phrase “Be still and know that I am God,” repeating it and then removing the last word each time:

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I

Be still and know that

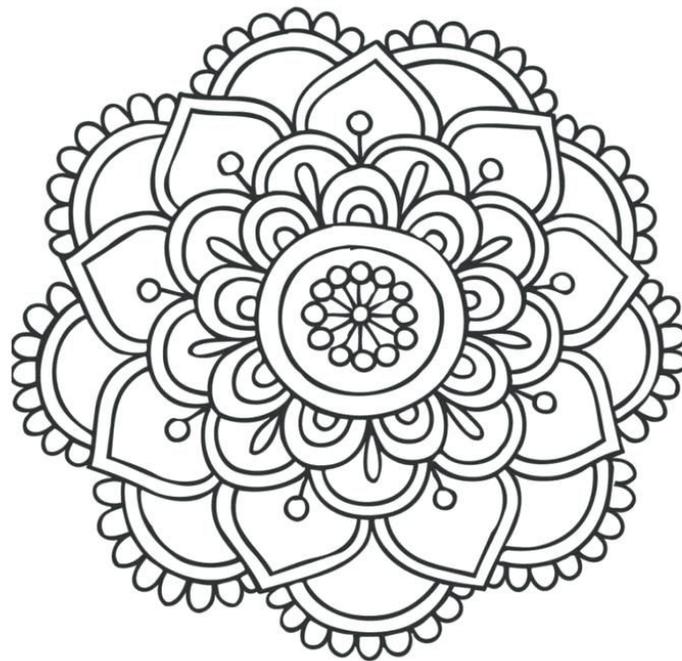
Be still and know

Be still and

Be still

Be

I found that to be extremely moving and comforting and I appreciate that each new sentence can stand on its own and bring a new and different meaning. I invite you to color this mandala as you repeat these words, or maybe while reciting Psalm 23 as that is part of the reading for today.



*Lord we ask that even in our times of trial we are able to be still and present. May we remember that just as we pray for guidance and stillness as we color this image, creativity and beauty can come out of times we feel troubled or unsure. Amen.*

**March 23rd**

**Michael Weber - Lutheran Volunteer Corps**

**Isaiah 59:9-19; Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 146**

Chapter 59 of Isaiah sounds familiar. Dark times are among us. People are crying out for justice. The darkness in this chapter is instilled not just by the presence of injustice, but by a lack of truth, a lack of any mechanism for change. Everyone is just sort of waiting around for something to happen. Nobody seems to be able to speak any word that might catalyze change, because nobody has a leg to stand on when “our sins testify against us,” says Isaiah.

So what is the solution? Well, this is the Bible we’re talking about. It’s God who’s going to come in with mighty righteousness. But why does God come to bring requital? “He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene,” writes Isaiah. No one is standing up and bringing about truth and justice. So God stands in, and his glory “will come like a pent-up stream that the wind of the Lord drives on.”

Don’t we all feel like that way so much of the time? That justice is far away, that any time we try to speak truth, “truth stumbles in the public square?” That’s what darkness is: not knowing the way out. But then there’s also those moments when we feel release, when almost inexplicably, the “wind of the Lord” moves through us or those around us and all of a sudden, the waters of justice wash over us. But how do these moments, when all the pent-up is released, happen?

Look at Acts 9, when Saul is rounding people up, and loses sight after hearing the reprimanding voice of Jesus. And the hesitant disciple Ananias is asked by the Lord to go to Saul and lay hands on him, so he may see again. But Ananias responds, “isn’t this the evil dude who is messing with your saints, those who proclaim your name?”

Here we have the same roadblock, the same stagnancy of indecision that Isaiah described. No one seems able to bring about justice. But God sees this, and calls to Ananias. Now, Ananias could have rejected this request, because it does seem ridiculous. Why would Ananias, in service of God, go bless an enemy of the God in the

name of God? Ananais might have been wondering: what will my fellow disciples think of me if I go to bless our persecutor? Am I really for the cause?

Ananais goes to bless Saul, and then Saul ends up being the one teaching that Jesus is the Son of God. Truth is finally brought to the public square without stumbling. This was made possible by God's intervention, because God saw that Saul wasn't going to change by himself, and Ananais didn't know what to do about Saul. So yes, God intervenes. But divine intervention means nothing if we don't have faith, if we don't answer the call! It's simple: God can move through us if we put our faith in God. We must be willing to brave repercussions, to be truthful about our inadequacies, and speak God's truth anyway.

### **March 24th**

**Isaiah 42:14-21; Colossians 1:9-14; Psalm 146**

*Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save"*

Psalm 146:3

*Lord, we are worried. We see the ways that folly and evil are acting upon the world and we feel helpless. We see the princes of our city, our nation, and the nations of our friends and we are troubled. Give us strength to speak out where we can, and fill our hearts with hope. Remind us that you are our Redeemer, and help guide us to live our lives in a manner that glorifies your Kin-dom. Amen.*

### **March 25th**

**Langley Hoyt, YAV**

**Isaiah 60:17-22; Matthew 9:27-34; Psalm 146**

#### Seeing in the Dark

I was sitting on the bus with my headphones in, listening to a politics podcast and feeling worried. As I watched H street pass by through the window, I felt a tap on my forearm. A small, older woman sitting next to me asked if it was going to rain today. It shouldn't start raining until 6, I said. She said good (she had grocery shopping to do) and asked about tomorrow. I checked my weather app again and said it would be windy. We laughed together about how the wind was probably going to blow us away. I took my headphones out of my ears, reluctant to pause my podcast but not wanting to

block this woman out either. As the bus approached her stop, she stood and swayed on the jolting bus and told me she hoped I had a wonderful evening. The interaction left a little smile on my face for several more stops.

“The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation,” Isaiah 60 says. Isaiah promises the flourishing of God’s people and lays out the image of the Kingdom of God coming to fruition in the world. The Creator will be what illuminates the world around us, brighter and better than the yellow of the sun warming our skin or the gentle moonbeams whispering blue. I yearn to see so freely, so brightly. The good news of Jesus is that we don’t have to wait until we die to experience the kingdom of heaven on earth.

In Matthew 9, Jesus fulfills the promise laid out in Psalm 146: he gives sight to the blind. God invites us to see in new ways much greater than our physical capacity to see with our eyes. The moment I had with a stranger on the bus was an invitation. I took out my headphones and stepped back from existential worry into a concrete interaction with a woman whose kindness and humor felt like a sunbeam on my dreary gray commute. One became two. We were a mighty nation together on that bus. Once I took out my headphones and refocused my sight on the beloved child of God sitting next to me, I saw the kingdom-light glimmer and expand.

### **March 26th**

**Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11; Psalm 130**

*Great Creator, Lord of day and night, we know that you are with us in the nighttimes of our lives as you are in the day. Help us to see you and trust in you even in seasons of lamentation, mourning, and woe. Give us the courage to walk on even when times are difficult, for we know that you will provide. Amen.*

### **March 27th**

**Submitted Anonymously**

**Ezekiel 33:10-16; Revelation 11:15-19; Psalm 130**

*“None of the sins that person has committed with be remembered against them. They have done what is just and right; they will surely live.”*

That's Ezekiel 33:16. This point in time could be considered "Night time". Things are pretty dark, let's be honest. The world is on fire, a new disease is rearing its ugly head, our country is split into so many groups it's hard to keep track.

But God is with us, just as God was with his only son on the night he was crucified. And that crucifixion is what we're all gearing up for in Lent. Christ died for our sins. He died so that even if we do sin, if we turn around and begin to do what is just and good and right, we will love forever in God's Kingdom. So walk through this "nighttime" and know that God is with you.

**March 28th**

**Amanda Lindamood**

**Ezekiel 36:8-15; Luke 24:44-53; Psalm 130**

<sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in God's word I put my hope.

Psalm 130, vs 5

When I left for college, I imagined a semi-permanent move. Who I was at 17 needed a relocation. My final weeks of college and early transition months included three sudden deaths, an engagement, a broken engagement, a wedding, a birth, a move, a job, more than one hospitalization, emerging and lasting responsibilities. Amidst that unraveling I found my life planted in a community and place I had intentionally left. I found that there was work I couldn't do from anywhere else, internal work, relational work, bodily work.

When I hear the psalmist write, "my whole being waits", I know what that feels like. I know the faith that circumstances and timing refine, and have refined in me. These Scriptures tell us of a God who is sovereign, a God who allows suffering, and a God who is ultimately moved to redeem and gather the entire world back to wellbeing. These Scriptures point to Jesus blessing the whole world, even as he ascends.

Beyond saying that there is a season for everything, this Scripture says only that **there is everything**. There is great joy, there are tremendous losses, there are inheritances, there is refuge, there is a future, there is all that has been promised.

When we remember that we are witnesses to Jesus, we must remember that we have been offered everything that Jesus can experience. Internally. Relationally. Bodily.

*Holy One, you have often spoken more plainly to us that we confess. You have many times named exactly what we can expect, and that has been hard to bear. Enable us to receive the good gift of our faith formation, and the places we must return to where that will occur. Embed in us the memory of your promises, and your essence, and our own.*

### **March 30th**

**Minister Ronald Young, Jr., Greater Refuge Temple DC**

**Friend of Luther Place**

**1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12; Psalm 143**

I often remember to thank God when things are going well. When the sun is shining and the birds are chirping I can feel the majesty of God's creation.

When the job is good, opportunities abound, money is in the bank, and relationships are good, I remember that God is near and I thank him for his blessings.

However when things get hard, sometimes I reach for everything except God. Being a problem solver by nature I look to solve the problem myself rather than seeking the face of the one who guides my feet. Sometimes I forget that God knows where I am and can lead me out of the night.

When my path is no longer lit, and I can't see a way forward, it is more imperative then, than ever, for me to ask for the light of God to shine. Rather than curling up and waiting for daylight, it's important to understand how to reach out and grasp at God's hand. God is always available and is ready to guide you into the light.

*Oh God, help me. I am blind on my journey, and the night has surrounded me on every side. I know that if you take my hand I will be ok, but I've forgotten where to reach. Please find me and show me the way out. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray, Amen.*

### **March 31st**

**Eddy Ameen**

**2 Kings 4:18-37; Ephesians 2:1-10; Psalm 143**

In Psalm 143, we plead, "Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord! I have fled to you for refuge." To seek refuge in God means then to be in a place where enemies

cannot reach us. The journey is implied in this psalm; running from the bad things and seeking a new land of safety and bounty. What are any of us who recite this Psalm but people seeking refuge, as refugees? What then does the plight of today's refugee have to do with us? Apparently, everything. We are in the space of the in-between, the running from and running toward... still running, not yet settled. With God, may we catch our breath for a moment. The journey will continue.

### **April 1st**

**Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41; Matthew 22:23-33; Psalm 143**

*Great Creator we confess to you that we are bound up in worldly structures that keep us away from you. We get caught up in the rules of the day, more interested in being right than having faith in your teachings. Forgive us, God, and remind us of your unending grace. Amen*

### **April 2nd**

**Bekka Meyer**

**1 Samuel 16:11-13; Philippians 1:1-11; Psalm 31:9-16**

Today's Psalm reading is a roller coaster, a reminder of what is ahead in Holy Week. Verses 9-13 are painful to read – scheming, terror, pain, grief, and more. The afflictions described are both physical and emotional, along with the agony of rejection by the community around the psalmist. Then there's a sudden turn towards hope: "but I trust in you, O Lord," "deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors," "save me in your steadfast love," and more. In the midst of sorrow and grief, the psalmist shifts to concentrate on trust and God's love.

Soon Palm Sunday will be here, where we will both celebrate and mourn over the course of one worship service. We'll experience a joyful high, before we drop into the sobering darkness that begins Holy Week. Palm Sunday is challenging for me because of this contrast – I'll admit that I don't like the discomfort I feel by the end of the service. Yet, I know there's a purpose for that discomfort. As we approach Holy Week, may we remember this Psalm and its mixture of pain and hope, which we so often experience in tandem, and which envelop us during these final days of the Lenten season.

### **April 3rd**

**Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-30; Psalm 31:9-16**

**Sam Shin, YAV**

For some, the season of Lent may be a nerve racking, stressful season filled with anxiety and doubt. And no, not because you denied yourself a cup of coffee for the first of an endless 46 days. For students, maybe it's because you have to make a decision about what your next step will be for the upcoming summer or next semester. For others, maybe a big decision will be facing you in the coming days, or you have a major deadline before the spring season ends.

Whatever may be facing you, you may feel "like broken pottery" or "consumed by anguish." Jesus never said following him was easy. But let us not instantly retreat to our comforts and endure. For even though it may feel as though the world is crashing in on us, we are never alone, and never given something we cannot endure. Even if your Lenten season is not completely successful or perfect, it is okay. As long as in the end we say, with our actions and voice, that "You are my God" his "unfailing love" will not fail us.

### **April 4th**

**Doug Walter**

**Lamentations 3:55-66; Mark 10:32-34; Psalm 31:9-16**

*"You came near when I called you, and you said, 'Do not fear.'" Lamentations 3:57*

Again and again God in scripture tells us to not be afraid. And yet, that night in Gethsemane, the night of his betrayal, Jesus was afraid. He tells Peter, James and John who were with him that his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death and asks them to keep watch. In Mark 14:35-40, we are told he falls to the ground and asks God if he might not have to sacrifice himself for mankind, and when Jesus comes back to them, he finds his disciples fast asleep, and knows that he is about to be arrested.

Looking out into the night sky, with its moon, and clouds, and billions of stars and planets, we can have comfort in knowing that God is the universe. But God is not just a universal 'everything'. Jesus is God incarnate. What an amazing gift God has given us,

to let us know that s/he understands human pain and suffering and fear. God is with us, because s/he understands us, and s/he tells us "do not fear."

In writing this, I've just offered a prayer to God: "Thank you for the gift of bringing Jesus into our world. Thank you for understanding me. Thank you for knowing that I feel fear and that you are with me, always with me."

### **April 6th**

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

**Sara Babcock**

As we come to the end of the Lenten season, our texts remind us that we are preparing for something new:

- A new way of bringing justice
- A new covenant
- A new tent

Sometimes when I am surrounded by night, it can be impossible to imagine my life being any other way. I'm so caught up in my own sadness or anxiety or fear that I can't even fathom a time that I won't be.

The thing is, these nighttimes never last -- they're a season like any other. And this season of Lent gives way to the miracle of Easter, a time that brings new insight every year. I often wonder if Easter and the beauty of spring would be as meaningful if it was not preceded by a time of bleak Lenten winter.

*Great Creator, thank you for walking besides us through the days and nights, the winters and springs, the good and bad of our lives. Guide us to new paths, that we may live our lives in a way that glorifies you. Amen.*

### **April 7th**

**Justin Fitch**

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

When we think of God, or talk about God (theology), our tendency can be to make things more complicated than they need to be (sometimes just to seem more intelligent). It can lead us to wonder, "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is

the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” Certainly, this reading from 1 Corinthians is not suggesting wisdom is unimportant, but it is referring to a certain kind of wisdom. There’s the scribe, who is a church leader and so “wisdom of the world” – that must be referring to those non-believers! Well, when we read the Gospels, whom is Jesus constantly calling out? It’s the religious leaders – the scribes, the pious ones. Those who are concerned with religious language.

“Is it the first Sunday *of* Lent or the first Sunday *in* Lent?”

“That’s called a CHASUBLE – how could you *not* know that?”

“Dip it in the cup? Oh, you must mean *intinction*.”

It may surprise you, but Jesus never uses any of those words; in fact, they aren’t in the Bible at all. “But we proclaim Christ crucified... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” That’s it! God becoming human, dying, and defeating death because God loves us. In the night times of our lives, often the simplest things – the presence of God, communion with our “family” – are what get us through. All that Jesus really asks is to follow in the example of Jesus’ life. “Whoever serves me must follow me...” And in the very next verse we read “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’?” The beauty of Christ being *human* is that even this God-human struggled with the task before them. Christ experienced humanity and understands. Jesus walked in the night, and if we follow Jesus, Jesus will be with us in our darkest journeys.

*Do not be afraid, I am with you*

*I have called you each by name*

*Come and follow Me*

*I will bring you home*

*I love you and you are mine*

**April 8th**

**Pastor Karen**

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

How was it to Live with Lent in 2020? How was it journeying with God at Night? At this end of Lent, I offer you some questions prompted by the Scripture from Matthew 9: 27-34:

Review your days — where was God with Lent? Was there mystery? Consider it.

Nighttime encounters? Name them. Was God silent or absent? Ponder God's presence.

Were there difficult emotions that arose for you? Are there things that you see differently after living with Lent 2020? Are there things you find yourself speaking about differently after living with Lent 2020?

*As we move into Holy Week, may the practices of Living with Lent step us towards Holy Week and the Three Days. May the movement of Christ's passion also be present in us, and with us. And as we journey towards the nighttime of the Good Friday suffering, may the Vigil of Easter gather us, reminding us all of our baptism as beloveds and giving us hope in our days!*