

2023 LENTEN
DEVOTIONAL
BOOKLET

Written by Churches of
Los Alamos, New Mexico



Welcome!

Dear friend in Christ:

We commend this book of Lenten Meditations as one spiritual aid for your journey with Jesus Christ. We know that many of you already follow a daily devotional practice, and we encourage you to continue with that practice. What makes this booklet unique is that these daily devotions are created by folks within our six churches, people we know, those with whom we work, worship, and serve. As you read the scripture assigned for each day and the meditation drawn from it, also reflect on the person who wrote it. Lift that person in prayer—prayer of thanksgiving for sharing his/her/their faith with us, and prayer for God’s continued presence and blessing in their lives. This year, as we find our way through the residual of COVID, we focus on gathering in community. Most of our time in living with the COVID virus forced us to be in isolation, we have kept our distance physically, and we continue at times to use the tool of masks to keep us from harming one another. And yet, we are called to be in community, and we gather together with the love of God through the gift of Jesus Christ. We invite you to read the devotions slowly, thoughtfully, one day at a time, using your Bible to find the assigned scripture. And friends, in case you have not had this invitation: You too can have a Bible App on your phone. It is lightweight, in many translations, and at the ready as we know you have your phones with you most of the time. One recommended app is YouVersion that has scripture, reading plans, devotions, and prayers. In whatever way you open God’s word, let God’s Spirit guide your thoughts in this time of reflection, that you would be open to Jesus’ teachings and

leading during these days of Lent and Holy Week. We are thankful for every church and person who contributed to these meditations, and all of you who share in this spiritual journey this year.

In Christ's Love,

The Rev. David Elton

The United Church of Los Alamos

The Rev. Nicol   Raddu Ferry

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Rev. Keith Lewis

The United Church of Los Alamos

The Rev. John Nash, Pastor

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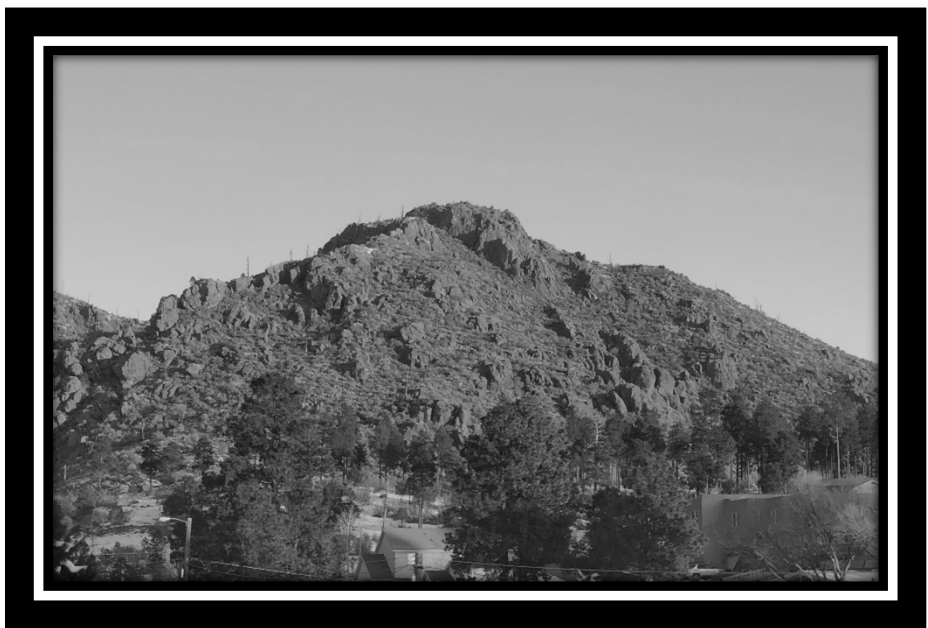
The Rev. Sean Smith

White Rock United Methodist Church

The Rev. Deb Worley

White Rock Presbyterian Church





A Prayer for Los Alamos

Almighty God... We give you thanks for this gift of community. You have called us to engage with each other with hope, joy, and love as your disciples. Open our hearts and our eyes to see our community as you see this community. Help us to find courage and patience to sit and hear others when so often we want to be heard first. Let us see all people as children of yours created and loved. In the name Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

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Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:19)

Ash Wednesday

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

We begin each Lent with a reminder that we are creations bound to the earth from which we were made. In the Episcopal Eucharistic Prayer C, we pray to God whose command brought forth "the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home." We are of the dust of creation.

To look from the ashes on our brows to the stars above our heads, we see that all around us—from here to 13 billion lightyears beyond us—all is of the same humble stuff of the cosmos. Even the Stardust beneath our feet.

In prayer, we acknowledge God as our ground in which we live, move, and have our being. We raise our eyes from the earth in which we stand to see the stars and feel insignificant. And yet, each of us is the only one of us that is, special for the time we have to share with one another. And when we die, we do not end. In death, we affirm that ultimately there is new life.

Lent is our annual *momento mori* to learn more deeply – "for so did you ordain when you created me, saying, 'You are dust, and to dust you shall return.' All of us go down to the dust, yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia."

Prayer: *Almighty God, You have created us out of the dust of the earth: Grant that the ashes we receive this day may be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence, that we may remember that it is only by Your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*

The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (v.2, NIV)

Repent, For the Kingdom of Heaven Has Come Near

The Bible says that Elijah must come first before the Messiah comes. Jesus said in reference to John, "this is Elijah, who is to come". "I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they didn't recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted to".

When I read about John and Jesus, one thing that jumps out at me is that they both were doing what God called them to do. Both preached "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven [God] is at hand!" Repent (metanoia), has to do with turning your life around and going in a new direction.

Repentance is more than confessing that you have sinned, but is a turning away from sin, and turning to a fruitful life. To think differently, and, therefore, to act differently. To face sin squarely and renounce it is to be freed from it. John does not call people to repent so that the kingdom will come. He calls them to repent because the kingdom has come near and is upon then (engiken).

Repentance and preparing for the Lord is a perpetual task. Repentance is not a one-time action but must take place daily. Neither our world, nor our lives, are suitable for the presence of God. We face a Herculean task to make our lives suitable, an impossible task except by the grace of God. Our work of preparation starts now and will not be complete until the day that Jesus comes again, at which time he will complete it.

Prayer: *Dear God, Help us to realize that repentance is a daily task. Turning to a God-filled life is a step-by-step lifetime process. Thank you for Your grace and acceptance of us as Your children. Guide us daily with Your wisdom so we can become freed from the bondages of sin and know true freedom. Amen.*

Susan Sprake
Trinity on the Hill

Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

(v.22, NIV)

Would I Have Followed Jesus?

How strange it must have been—this crowd of people following Jesus. At the time, Jesus was just some guy. A radical preaching all sorts of wild concepts seen as contradictory or new in nature. And yet, people followed him. They followed him without knowing where he was going, who he really was, or what his endgame would be. As swift as this passage makes it out to be for Peter, Andrew, James, and John, I can only imagine there had to be some sort of internal struggle for all of these men who chose to leave their homes and walk alongside this strange man. But, somewhere in that struggle, there also had to be a knowing. A deep, personal, but maybe also confusing *knowing* that Jesus was someone different; someone *more*. What if they would have said no? How does God prepare us for moments like this. The “jump ship” moments where we completely upend our lives and everything we know to follow something new and different? Despite the questions, despite the “what if”s, I still find myself whispering in my heart—“Please, God. Choose me.”

Prayer: *God, we never know what You have prepared for us. All we can do is trust You, and listen to the gentle (or sometimes bold) knowing we have within us when You call. Help us to trust that knowing, and when You do choose us, be with us as we ask the questions. Let them not hold us back from following where we should go. Amen.*

Sam McRae

Trinity on the Hill

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (v.4, NIV)

Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for forty days and nights without food. He survived because God protected him against starvation. When he was tempted by the devil to turn rocks into bread, Jesus told him that man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

As you awaken in the morning, call upon the Lord to send the Holy Spirit to you. Remember God's promises. He is our refuge and strength. You may shrink in the face of the troubles you will meet today. You may have tremendous challenges, but know that the Lord God asks you to leave them at His feet.

The Lord is the bread of life. Feed on His words. They will satisfy a deeper hunger. Walk humbly before Him. Rely on Him. He will give you strength. Know that our ultimate source of sustenance and strength is not found in material possessions or worldly success, but in the word of God.

Try to make time for daily devotions and Bible study. Reflect on the scripture, and let God's word nourish and sustain you. Always make an effort to practice gratitude and kindness towards others. This will help you to focus on God and the blessings He gives us. By keeping our eyes fixed on God and His word, we can find true fulfillment and purpose in our lives.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, fill me today with the Holy Spirit. Help me to know that You are with me through all trials and cares. Feed my soul with Your comforting words, and give me strength to face the day. Amen.*

Marilyn Lisowski
Trinity on the Hill

“While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.” (v.3, NRSV)

The Joy of Forgiveness

On this first Sunday of Lent, we are beckoned to open our hearts to examine our lives and to confess our sins. That’s the message of verse 3 in Psalm 32: to hold our tongues and dwell on our sins damages, not only our souls, but our bodies as well.

We all sin. We all fall short of the mark. Saint Paul admitted as much in Romans 7:15: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”

When we hold our tongues, we deprive ourselves of release. When we keep our silence, we allow our sins to fester in our souls, and—in the parlance of 12 Step Recovery—we open ourselves to “stinking thinking”. That I am not worthy to be forgiven.

There’s a Lenten hymn in the Episcopal Hymnal sung to the tune of a French carol. The second verse goes: “To bow the head in sackcloth and in ashes, or rend the soul, such grief is not Lent’s goal, but to be led to where God’s glory flashes, his beauty to come near. Make clear, make clear, make clear where truth and light appear.”

Lent calls us to acknowledge the first verse of Psalm 32 and relish in God’s grace: “Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven.” And remember to embrace the joy of forgiveness.

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan, come quickly to help us, who are assaulted by many temptations, to open our hearts and confess our sins that we might know the joy of Your forgiveness. In Christ’s Holy Name we pray. Amen.*

The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.’ (v.6, NRSVA)

Are You Hungry?

Often during Lent, we try to abstain from certain foods or beverages that we enjoy the rest of the year. It’s that “What are you giving up for Lent?” question. But even though we might give up chocolate, or desserts, or that glass of wine, we will not get so hungry or so thirsty that it hurts.

Jesus, in the “beatitudes” promises his disciples that if they “hunger and thirst” for righteousness, they will be filled. I think that those disciples, and certainly the crowds that followed Jesus knew of actual physical hunger and thirst, a condition that, for most of us living here in Los Alamos in 2023, is only a concept.

In our prayers we remember “the poor,” those who don’t have enough to eat, children all over the world who are starving. We give our resources to help people in our own community who might not have enough to eat. Those are good, “righteous” practices.

Is Jesus calling for even more? What about when we feel spiritually empty? Jesus is promising us that if our need for him is so strong it feels like REAL hunger, REAL thirst, that we will be filled. We will be blessed.

In your Lenten discipline, replace that abstinence with hunger for mercy, hunger for purity in heart, hunger for peace. In that hunger, you will receive mercy, you will see God, and you will be called His child.

Prayer: *Almighty and most merciful God, help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this for the love of Your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*
(From The Book of Common Prayer)

Joe Cox

Trinity on the Hill

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” (v.7, NIV)

And When You Pray...

When I was younger, I struggled with praying, both aloud and silently. I started out okay. But, as I kept praying, I often got lost in a torrent of words and definitely had trouble coming to an ending. Over time, I realized that my most powerful, heartfelt prayers happened when I was stressed and fearful. I prayed with and for family and friends in ERs and hospital rooms. The words flowed easily and without going on forever.

On February 28, 2017, I was facing life-altering surgery. My church family was lifting me up in prayer, but I was at a loss for words myself. I couldn't manage even the Lord's Prayer or the Jesus Prayer. Finally, eight words filled my mind and my heart: "Be still, and know that I am God." These words surrounded me with the presence of the Lord. They were with me as I was wheeled to the OR, and they were with me as I returned to consciousness. These words are from my favorite psalm (Ps. 46:10), and they were there when I needed God the most. And despite the number of times I repeated these eight words, I was not babbling, and I was not worried about getting God's attention. I relaxed – was still – and knew that God was watching over me and protecting me.

In this season of Lent and amid the busyness of our daily lives, I pray we all may relinquish control and rest in the presence of God.

Prayer: *Dear God, cleanse us of all anxiety and fear, and wrap us securely in the sanctuary of Your love. Amen.*

Margaret Odell

Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (v.16, NIV)

By Their Fruit You Will Recognize Them

When I was much younger, my brother and I spent summers helping my grandfather on his farm. Mostly we did one thing: Finding, digging up, and burning two plants in his acreage – buckhorn thistles and multiflora roses.

The thistles, though beautiful, were harmful if eaten by his cows. Thistles were wild, scattered by the wind. The multiflora roses were actually planted by him back in the 1930s as natural fence rows. Seems the Department of Agriculture had advocated multiflora roses as an easy means of creating natural fences to keep cattle herded. The problem: A typical plant produces a million seeds a year. Birds eat the seeds and where they leave their droppings, new multiflora roses grow.

Since the 1930s the multiflora roses had grown all over the farm. We would spend hour upon hour digging up young multiflora roses. When they had gotten way out of hand, we'd run a rod under the branches, lift them up, slide a chain around the bush's base, and pull it up by the roots using my grandfather's John Deere tractor. It seemed like we never made real headway against the roses. They persisted, they endured.

You would think roses would be a good thing. Sometimes what we think we are doing doesn't turn out the way we intended. We cannot always foresee the end when we are but at the beginning. Sometimes we just have to wait for our efforts to bear fruit.

Prayer: *Almighty Father, we pray as we toil in the fields of the Lord to till and seed the soil of the Kingdom, that our efforts may bear good fruit. Bless us with your grace that our desire to do your will be acceptable in your sight. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood. (v.34, RSV)

Jesus' Bad Day!

Jesus has had a tough day. He has dealt for many hours with great crowds of people begging to be healed. Toward the end of the day, he has "had it", and asks the apostles to take him to the opposite shore of the Sea of Galilee. Absolutely exhausted, he crawls into the back of the boat and falls asleep. Shortly after, a dangerous wind storm began to rock the little boat. Even though he'd assured the group of men that he would be with them always, their immediate reaction was to rush back and shake him awake. One can forgive him for being annoyed as he responds, "Why are you afraid O men of little faith." After rebuking the winds, he watches as they approach the shore of Gadara. As he leaps out of the boat he is met by two men suffering from a very aggressive form of mental illness. They scream at him in a terrifying manner as they recognize that he is the Son of God. He then turns their demons loose onto a herd of pigs and the two men are calmed. At this point, he was probably expecting their countrymen to rejoice at the healing but, instead, they beg him to leave the neighborhood! That must have been devastating to poor Jesus!

Have you ever failed to recognize a gift from Jesus, especially when it hits your pocketbook like the Gadarenes? Sometimes, his requests seem to be more than we are willing to graciously receive.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Thank You for asking more of me than I think that I can handle. Please give me the strength and wisdom to follow Your requests. Amen.*

Jo Moore
Trinity on the Hill

Friday, March 3

Matthew 9:9-17

“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” (v.13, NRSV)

Pleading for Mercy

It is mercy, not sacrifice, which God desires of us. Yet, we finite humans get this wrong more often than we get it right.

Profess to be Christians, and many have clear views of what that looks like. But how many of us see our faith worked out in actions which go the opposite direction of mercy?

Just think about criminal justice in our society. We have more of our citizens incarcerated than any other industrialized country. And often, we seek to make the punishment harsher. Somehow, we believe that will deter crime. Not that it does, but we think so.

We fail to recognize the underlying causes of criminal action, things like substance abuse and mental illness. We focus on punishment to the exclusion of addressing aspects which would demonstrate mercy.

Not that we're unique. It was the same in Hosea's day. The people would offer sacrifices, but would overlook ways to treat each other with mercy, with steadfast love (Hosea 6:6). Rather than locking people up, ought we seek ways to demonstrate love and mercy? Rather than seeking more and bigger prisons, ought we not meet the needs of the mentally ill?

During this Lenten season, ought we not seek mercy, not for ourselves, but for those we overlook in our society?

Prayer: *God of Love, Accept not our sacrifices and offerings, but our service to those most in need of mercy. Amen.*

The Rev. Dr. James Hogue, Former Correctional Chaplain
Missouri Department of Corrections, ret.
United Church of Los Alamos

As they were coming down the mountain... (v.9a, NRSV)

Coming Down the Mountain

Sure!

We'd love to stay
up here atop the mountain,
sure-footed and surrounded

by light and the shining face of Jesus;
astonished by the presence of Elijah and Moses.

Like Peter, James and John, we are lulled by the theater
of the day and we, too, beg to stay. But there's another show that must go
on: the hike down the mountain and into the everydayness of
the marketplace,
the classroom,
the playground,
the boardroom,
the lab, the pew.

Down here, we may not be surrounded by visions of Bible heroes or a
radiant Messiah; not face-to-face with Transfiguration. But visions and
radiance come to us in different ways down here. Look around.

The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn writes in The Miracle of Mindfulness:

*"People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real
miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth."*

It's an ongoing miracle. Jesus comes down from the thin air and walks with
us now, still speaking of suffering and sacrifice. Listen to the voice of God's
beloved asking us to follow him. Bring the light of those heights into the
nooks and crannies of our lives. Shine a laser focus on injustice. Beam hope
into a hospice room. Reflect goodness in the face of discord and dishonesty.
Let the mountaintop moment sustain us for the nitty gritty of miraculous life
here, on Earth.

Prayer: *Light of the World, walk with us wherever we go in this Lenten season.
Teach us again that the miracle is to walk on Earth. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

The Rev. Ms. Laura Loving
The United Church of Los Alamos

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. (v.2, NRSV)

Help

“Help!” Perhaps you have heard, or even made, that plea for assistance. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where we are looking for strength, support, and protection. The Psalmist in this text writes of a God who not only protects us, but knows us. Let that sink in for a moment. God knows us, each of us. If you read about ascent psalms, you will find that they are short enough to be memorized and possibly sung...sung as a meditation on a journey. As we journey through life and in particular this Lenten Season, God is ever present on our walk to Jerusalem and ultimately the cross. Our strength and protection comes from the one who provides for us. Twelve Days into this time of self-reflection, may we see that we never journey alone. The One who created us walks along side and cares for us each step of the way. I don’t know about you, but there are many days when it is reassuring to know that I don’t struggle on my own. Indeed, as a family of faith in this community we share in each other’s journey and in moments when there is a need for support we step up for each other. We know there is joy that will come on Easter Sunday morning, but the true, life-changing joy comes from the experience on the journey together!

Prayer: *Eternal God, hear us in our moments when we are most vulnerable and we cry out for help. Walk with us and protect us as we try to live out our faith each day. Helps us to support fellow travelers and be a source of encouragement. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray....Amen.*

The Rev. Keith Lewis
United Church of Los Alamos

Monday, March 6

Matthew 10:1-15

As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with a skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. (v.7-8, NIV)

What Shall I Do While My Faith is Weak?

The disciples were sent out to preach the message of the kingdom, and do good while being wholly dependent on God. They saw miracles and were given authority by God to perform them, but they sometimes failed due to their lack of faith.

We all struggle with faith, just like the disciples did. We often tack “faith” up as a cute poster, trivializing the enormity of the sacrifice it takes to have it. Faith requires the surrendering of your mind, which puts you in a humbling and dependent position. If the disciples had faith smaller than a mustard seed, with miracles, how small must ours be without them!

However, in the meantime, we, like the disciples, are sent out and have work to do. Even with our small faith, we can give freely, remembering that God gives freely to us. We can greet others and show them love. With our small faith, we can be at peace with others. With our small faith, we can “let it go” when people shun us. Use your small faith to pray for humility and trust!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, forgive my small faith. Help me to lean on You and to trust Your ways. Let me follow Your wisdom and show love to others even if I don't “feel like it.” Help me overcome my unbelief.*

Julia Sheppard

United Church of Los Alamos

Tuesday, March 7

Matthew 10:16-25

“When they persecute you in one town, run away to another one. I assure you that you will not finish your work in all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” (v.23, GNB)

How the Light Comes In

This Gospel, according to Matthew, passage finds us toward the end of Jesus’ “Missions 101” class for his Disciples in preparation for their field studies in taking the Good News to the towns of Israel. In the classes found recorded earlier in Matthew, they’ve been learning in the classroom and lab of being with Jesus. Now comes their field trial taking the radical, positive love of God’s way into the cracked norm which society has boxed itself into, shielding itself from the light of God.

Jesus never promised his disciple that they would be prosperous, comfortable, or successful. In fact, Jesus indicates that the task of spreading the abundant life that God offers will be down-right uncomfortable and dangerous. Don’t get lured down rabbit holes, Jesus seems to be saying, as there is more work to be done than can actually be accomplished before the Son of Man comes. So, keep on a keepin’ on, focused on the mission.

While pondering this difficult passage about “coming persecutions”, a quote came to my computer via a business-oriented newsletter. It resonated with my meditation on this passage. Leonard Cohen wrote, “There is a crack, a crack in everything.... That’s how the light gets in.” Even if a true Christian witness gets drummed out of an unreceptive place, at least the Light can enter through the crack formed.

Prayer: *God of Light and Life, shine in and through your Church—us—leaking especially into places where we’ve given up. Amen.*

Georgia Strickfaden
United Church of Los Alamos

Wednesday, March 8

Matthew 11:1-19

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (v.11, NRSV)

Great Upon Great

After telling John’s messengers to go and tell John about the good deeds they saw being done and the good news being shared, Jesus then expounded on the greatness of John who was “more than a prophet” (11:9). He was a prophet that another prophet prophesied about. Jesus concluded by declaring John to be the G.O.A.T. of all prophets! But then, in apparent reversal, he called John lower than the “least” in God’s kingdom.

It’s not difficult to argue John’s greatness and devotion to God’s mission, even if his question about whether Jesus was the Messiah came from his angst of being in prison. John was the prophet who not only prophesied about the Messiah’s coming, but who baptized and participated in the beginning of Jesus’ messianic ministry and age.

Jesus was not belittling John when he said he was below the least in God’s kingdom. He was lifting up his church. He was affirming the greatness of our acceptance to follow, to serve, and to share good news with any and all—through belief, kind deeds, and truth. That’s right! Jesus was telling his disciples about *their* greatness. Disciples who would still waiver in their faith and had a long way to go. Like them, we probably do not think of ourselves as great, let alone greater than the Baptist. Furthermore, there are times we also can and do waiver. But never undervalue the lives of faith you have and live. All the good deeds being done, all the good news being shared, and all the lives being lifted are nothing short of great!

Prayer: *Great God who gives us life and faith, help us to see and share in all the great ways Christ’s love is being shared through us. Amen.*

The Rev. David Elton
United Church of Los Alamos

Thursday, March 9

Matthew 12:15-21

“Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the gentiles...” (v.18, NIV)

God’s Chosen Servant

God’s Chosen Servant, three significant words and when put together, are very powerful.

In this passage, Matthew quotes from the Old Testament using Isaiah’s first servant song in Isaiah 42:1-4. It describes Jesus’ quiet ministry as God’s chosen servant, a ministry that will “proclaim justice and hope to the nations”.

God chose His son, Jesus, to be His servant. Sent to do the will of God, to serve God’s people by healing them physically and also spiritually. God loved Jesus and was delighted in him and put His Spirit on him. He wanted Jesus to have a quiet ministry with no quarreling or reckless behavior so nations could put their hope in him.

Perhaps in the same way, God chooses us to be His servants. He loves us and hopefully is pleased with us (well maybe not all the time) and sends His Holy Spirit to speak for us as well as to us. God’s followers should be peacemakers. A faithful servant listens to and obeys his master, is prepared and ready to act, to help meet the needs of others. Jesus is our example of how we should love others, and now an example of how to be a chosen servant of God.

Prayer: *Lord help me to serve You in Your ministry that brings hope to all people, all nations. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.*

Irene Powell

The United Church of Los Alamos

And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? (v.27, NIV)

Casting Out Demons

The Christ's answer to the Pharisees' irrelevant question exposes that they really didn't care what his answer was. They didn't care about sin – only about their own self interests. Mark Twain tells in one of his works the story¹ of a Black man who went to sleep on a narrow strip of land in Missouri. During the night, the Mississippi River changed course a bit, cut through that narrow strip of land, and when the man awoke the next morning, he found he was in Illinois, not in Missouri. This made him a free man. And, it's that sort of thing that happens when a person asks God for forgiveness. He awakes to the same old earth, the same faces about him, the same self. But something is wonderfully different, because he stands up as a free man. Rather like a baptism. Die to sin; rise up belonging to God. No matter what happens. Accept it. Live it.

Prayer: *God, you have given us life and a beautiful world in which to live. We can't go begging for what isn't. We can be humble and offer thanksgiving that we have the tools we need to solve our problems. We can ask for courage to do the things we must do. Amen.*

Jim Cobble

United Church of Los Alamos

1. T. H. Conley, *From the Pulpit of Northside Drive Baptist Church, Marietta, GA*, 4, No. 11, June 10, 1979.

Saturday, March 11

Matthew 13:31-33,44-46

“...it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” (v.32, NRSV)

Neat Broccoli Tree

Did you know that the mustard plant, *Brassica Oleracea*, is more than a producer of your favorite yellow hot dog topping? Now I am no botanist, but when I heard that everything from broccoli to kale, brussels sprouts to cabbage, and even the well-known kohlrabi is descended from the mustard plant, my perception of the parable of the mustard seed expanded.

Jesus explains that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the “smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” - Matthew 13:32 NRSV.

Your faith is also like a mustard seed, and if you nurture it and cultivate it, it can start small then grow and produce something akin to a sanctuary for birds. It can also make a strange vegetable that nourishes many, and children pretend to be dinosaurs and munch from tiny trees or smothered in cheese. Your faith and calling are as distinct as you are, not to be copied and pasted but to be explored and created, with end products that provide sanctuary or nourish God’s creation or something new entirely. With God’s ever-guiding hand, we can grow together differently.

Prayer: *As we grow the Kingdom of God, help us remember not everyone’s mustard seed grows a mustard tree but expands your Kingdom for your glory, regardless. Amen.*

Phillip Ortega, Director of Faith Development
First United Methodist Church

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! (v.1, NRSV)

Make a Joyful Noise

I once had a member of a church, who was then in her 70s, tell me that she had been told in the 5th grade by her teacher that she had a terrible voice and shouldn't sing anymore. And she had never sung again. Her voice had been stolen from her. Her song had been taken from her. And I know she is far from the only one. But what do we lose when do not make a joyful noise to the Lord?

I have never had anyone ask me to give the same message again, but I get requests all the time for us to sing that song we haven't sung in a while. There is something special about music and the way it connects us with our faith and with each other and even the stories we tell. When we lose that, we lose a connection to those who have come before us and those who will come after.

If your song has been stolen from you, please take it back. Reclaim your voice. Reclaim your song so that you may make joyful noise singing songs of praise to God, even if it's only singing in the shower. And if you need help, I encourage you to seek out the saints of the church who help us to know the power of music and song.

Prayer: *O God of music,
even the heavenly spheres ring out in praise of You.
Help us to sing the songs of our faith;
to praise You with clashing cymbals and sounding trumpets,
with harp and lyre and timbrel,
making a joyful noise
that will ring through the years
to be taken up by generations yet to come. Amen.*

The Rev. John W. Nash
First United Methodist Church

Monday, March 13

Matthew 14:22-33

*But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out,
“Lord, save me!” (v.30, NIV)*

Dark Waters – Peter’s Prayer

Dark waters roar in the gathering storm,
rising and crashing in an angry sea.
The hungry wet cold drags me deeper,
pulling me farther away from Thee.

I see you walking on the water,
while I struggle in the depths alone;
With your arms held wide, you call my name,
across huge waves of the black unknown.

You know I can never walk on water,
I’m not you, Lord, I am only me.
Utterly alone, so very afraid,
I’m drowning in an angry black sea.

With fearful longing I take a step
as the waters swirl around my face.
Battling the waves, I push towards you,
believing the promise of your grace.

Before the ocean covers my head,
you gather me close and lift me high
out of the waters of gathering doom,
Until I stand with you eye to eye.

I will never walk alone on water,
I am too weak for this cold dark sea.
Only you will keep me safe from death,
If I simply place my trust in Thee.

Jeannie Hope Gibson

First United Methodist Church

Tuesday, March 14

Matthew 15:1-9

So, for the sake of your tradition, you nullify the word of God. (v.6, NRSV)

Teenage Angst – Would Jesus Agree with Standardized Testing

In this passage, Jesus is approached by the Pharisees, who intend to trap him through his disciples' lax behavior. Jesus condemns the Pharisees' rules, undermining the fundamental commandments in Scripture. Jesus condemns the Pharisees' ruling on the practice of sacrifices. The ten commandments state that one should honor their father and mother, but the Pharisees have ruled that someone can sacrifice to God even if the resources offered are needed to support one's parents. This is reminiscent of other systems created to support some value, but which end up undermining it by making the value subservient to the system.

Jesus' comments remind me of critiques concerning grading and standardized testing in public schools. Initially intended to figure out who needed help and the most effective means of helping them, grading and testing have become ends in-and-of themselves. Instead of using standardized tests to measure learning, learning has been adapted to the material on the tests. Instead of using grades to measure who needs help, grades are used as the primary motivator in school, causing students to work towards good grades instead of acquiring knowledge.

Jesus commands us to ignore traditions and systems which undermine scriptural commands. So, whether it's the practice of sacrifices undermining the commandment to honor one's father and mother or the grading system and standardized testing undermining learning, rules and systems obstructing their key values should be ignored.

Prayer: *Wassup God, Just as with the Pharisees, we and the systems surrounding us try to impose rules on faith. Despite the intent of these rules to support our faith, often, they can get in the way of your actual commands. Help us to identify and address where we allow traditions and rules to undermine our faith. Amen.*

William Dale & Sam Wescott – FUMC's Youth Group
First United Methodist Church

Wednesday, March 15

Matthew 15:21-28

Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that moment. (v.28, NRSV)

Not Yet!

The Canaanite woman persists with her request for Jesus to rid her daughter of demons. She respectfully points out that Jesus is the Messiah who has an abundance of miracles. Surely there's an extra miracle (like crumbs) for her daughter's healing. Jesus is focused on his mission to serve Israel but stops and heals her daughter because of her unwavering expression of faith.

It reminds me of times when I would hurry to pick up my son from daycare. He cried when I left him there to go to work. I told him to have a good day playing with his friends. I would get to the church daycare to pick him up and hurry to the playground where he was playing with his friends. I would say, "I'm here. Let's go." He would frown at me and say, "Not yet.", then proceed to ignore me and play happily with his friends. That was not the greeting I had envisioned or expected. After some time passed, he would run to me, give me a big hug, and say he missed me.

Sometimes we are focused on a task so much that we ignore other smaller requests that arise. If the request is persistent and is worthy of our attention we will stop to take care of it. Jesus being fully human may have been focused on Israel, ignoring the woman until she made her case. But do you think by waiting to take care of her, that maybe he was allowing the Canaanite woman to show her faith, so that others might understand?

Prayer: *Dear Lord, we want to continue to grow closer to you. Help us to recognize when you are calling us to change our direction or detour for a bit to fulfill your will. Amen.*

Lynn Kluegel

First United Methodist Church

Thursday, March 16

Matthew 16:21-28

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (v.24, RSV)

"Listen, Listen, Love, Love"

While serving on a Kairos Prison Ministry Team, we encountered a resident nick-named "Sneaker." (Name changed for my story.) She wore dark glasses all weekend and never looked us in the eye. Her long dark bangs covered her sunglasses. She sat back in her chair with her arms crossed and I thought "we are never gonna break this one. She is a rock. A hard nut to crack."

Really, all we wanted to do was to share the love of Christ. "Listen, listen, Love, love" is our motto. Throughout the weekend she didn't budge. We prayed, ate, sang, and told stories and testimonies of His love.

On the last day of our weekend, we held a Closing Ceremony. This ceremony gave the participants a chance to share what they learned over their four-day weekend.

"Sneaker" came into the classroom on that last morning with her hair done and pulled out of her eyes and full make-up. She wasn't wearing her sunglasses. When the participants had a chance to speak, she stood up and put her fists up in the air. With a big smile she said, "I did it!" I don't know what exactly she did, but she was proud of herself, felt good about herself, and I truly believe she felt the love of God. I never saw her again, but I hope and pray that she continued to feel that love and to share His love throughout those prison walls and with friends and family.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us to help those who cannot help themselves. Help us to reach out to the unlovable and to share YOUR love. For YOUR love is all encompassing, ever present, and all knowing. We thank You for sending us Your son to die on the cross for our sins. Thank You for loving us all just the way we are. Amen.*

Cathy Hinojosa

First United Methodist Church

Friday, March 17

Matthew 17:14-20

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (v.20, NIV)

Have Faith

So what is faith? The dictionary says, "complete trust or confidence in someone or something". Another is a strong belief in God. When Jesus says to the disciples "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

The disciples could not heal the boy because they didn't understand. It wasn't Jesus' words that healed the boy but his faith in God.

Oftentimes we are like the disciples. We try to solve our own problems by ourselves thinking we can solve them on our own. Only when we can't and they weigh us down so we go to God. Maybe it's not our lack of faith, but we feel the problem is so small that we can do it on our own.

What would happen if we took this to God in the first place? With confidence that God will help us, then we could face the problem with confidence we can overcome it with the help of God.

So, the next time we face a situation, let us draw on our faith or confidence in God.

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, we thank you for interceding when we need Your help. Help us to always come to You first for Your guidance and direction with our problems. In Your holy name. Amen.*

Julie Risch

First United Methodist Church

Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. (v.27, NKJV)

God's Forgiveness

Jesus told a story about God's forgiveness. A king went to collect his debts. One of his servants owed him 10,000 talents, which he could not repay. He begged for patience in repaying it. The king was moved with compassion and forgave him the debt.

Just how much is 10,000 talents? Depending on the source, it ranges anywhere between \$100,000 in The Message to \$3.4 billion, figured at a day's wage, a denarius, at the 2015 minimum wage. One talent is 6000 denarii. Multiplying that by ten thousand equals 60 million denarii or 60 million days of work. This is obviously not reality. No master would lend a servant that much money. But in Jesus' story, this is how much the king was willing to forgive the servant.

Do we really think this is how much God forgives us? Are we really so good (bad?) at sinning, that our debt is so great that it would be impossible for us to pay it off? If we just add up all those little things—the eyes rolling, the little white lies, the not so nice judgements in our heads, the unkind words, the unkind thoughts, the undone deeds, the host of unintentional hurts that we do every day—and not even think about those (fill in the blank) things we really consider bad, I guess it's true. Those little sins we do all day long, many of which we don't even think about as we do them, hurt our relationship with God. To be forgiven is worth every one of those 10,000 talents to be able to put it right.

Prayer: *Every time I _____, I hurt my relationship with You. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Amen.*

Carol Mead

First United Methodist Church

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (v.4, KJV)

Trust in the Hand of God

David certainly traversed literal valleys of the shadow in his life, and this poem reflects those journeys. It serves also as a metaphor for interior examination.

The interior journey of our lives is moved by outward circumstances and how our heart reacts to them. Our valley of the shadow is caught up in the ebbs and flows of misfortune and danger. The Lord traverses these with us. The rod and staff of God comfort us precisely because of their use on our behalf. The rod guides us, and the staff defends us.

When evil assails us, the staff shelters us. These temptations beset us to remove from us the love of God, the love of neighbor, and the love of self. Love requires courage, and there are temptations that sap courage, inhibit hope, and keep us from the joy that God has promised us.

When we trust the hand guiding the staff, we can have more confidence following the direction given through the rod. God leads into situations that are terrifying without that trust, but once the trust is established, we find ourselves in a different frame of mind.

The psalter does not say that enemies have been removed. The feast laid is in the presence of our enemies internal and external. Peace and restorations are manifested in the still waters of trust and direction in God.

Prayer: *God, guide us, shelter us, and give us eyes to see the ways in which Your guidance and protection are at work that we might daily grow in our trust and confidence in You. Amen.*

The Rev. Sean Smith
White Rock United Methodist Church

Monday, March 20

Matthew 19:16-26

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money^[a] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (v.21, NRSV)

Surrendering our Relationship to Time and Things

A rich, young man comes to Jesus and asks how to be saved. Jesus answers, but the answer does not satisfy the young man. Follow these commandments and you will be saved. But the young man has done these things. Salvation it seems is not enough for the young man, he wants something more. He is hungry for something more.

Jesus then gives him a task and an invitation.

Sell everything and give the money to the poor and come be with me.

Prevailing wisdom notes correctly that Jesus does not ask everyone to follow this stringent requirement to be a disciple. However, I wonder if we would not benefit from greater simplicity in our lives. I wonder how many of us are hungering for something more than can be supplied by one more product, one more outfit, one nicer TV set, one new book, one new activity. What if by giving up something or one thing we could make more space in our lives for relationships.

Giving up our things may feel like trying to fit through the eye of a needle, but with God it is possible. Christ's invitation to deepen our relationship with him is right there for us.

Prayer: *Almighty God, help us to surrender the ordering of our time and possessions to You. May You cultivate a proper relationship to the things in our lives that all that we are and all that we have might be offered to You. Amen.*

The Rev. Sean Smith

White Rock United Methodist Church

Tuesday, March 21

Matthew 20:1-16

“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?” (v.15, ESV)

God’s Amazing Generosity!

We notice in this passage that there are two kinds of workers. One kind contracted to work for a set amount of pay, basically the usual pay of a denarius. They wanted to get as much as they could for their labor. In the case of those hired later, they just wanted to work. They were willing to work and left the wage up to the owner. These day laborers lived a precarious existence, relying on someone hiring them each day in order to provide for their family. Likely the later hires expected less and were very grateful for the generosity of the owner in receiving a denarius.

Do we ever think this way in regard to our work for the Lord in His kingdom? If we have served in the Lord’s kingdom for many years, do we feel that maybe we deserve more than those who come to the Lord later in life? The Lord makes it clear that whether a person comes early or late they are equally loved and dear to the Lord.

The truth is that we could never earn or deserve what God gives us. All that God gives us is of grace. Whether the service we give is large or small, it is the spirit with which we do our part that matters to God. With a willing and open heart may we surely serve freely and give all praise to God for His amazing Gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, holy and true, how we give all praise to You. As You open doors of service for us, may we walk through them with gratitude and praise, trusting Your generous heart to provide for every need. In Jesus name. Amen.*

Virginia Norman

White Rock United Methodist Church

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant; (v.15, RSV)

Open Our Eyes

Jesus causes a ruckus. He comes into the temple, drives out all of the vendors, whether livestock or money changing, and then charges the current caretakers with making the place "a den of robbers." What is it that makes the Pharisees and scribes indignant? Not the cleaning house, but "when they saw the good things he did and because the children were crying out 'Hosanna to the Son of David.'" Indignant? Indignant implies that someone or something is unworthy, unjust or ungrateful. What could cause this reaction? The combination of events truly reveals the hardness of their hearts. Healing the blind and lame brings to mind Isaiah 42:7, indicating that God has begun to renew the world – surely they saw this. What probably bothered them was the identification of Jesus as the Messiah – "Hosanna to the Son of David." How can Jesus, a Galilean, allow the children to address him as such? Doesn't he know better? Since the Pharisees and scribes know all about the Messiah and Jesus certainly cannot be him. He was not the Messiah they envisioned!

We have to guard our hearts from missing Jesus because we have made up our minds on what is the "proper" Christian way of doing things. The Spirit moves in mysterious ways, and God is always eager to offer grace and mercy to all of His sinful children, often through unlikely means.

Prayer: *Lord, open our eyes to the ways You grant mercy to Your children and change our hearts so that we can rejoice when others are blessed by You.*

Mark Prokop

White Rock United Methodist Church

“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces its fruits. (v.43, NRSV)

The Fruits of the Kingdom

My wife and I have three apple trees in our yard. With little care from us, these three trees annually produce an abundance of apples. The apples are far from perfect. They are small, often buggy and, because they generally fall to the ground before they are ready for picking, they are also bruised and broken. But even in their imperfection, they provide a feast for the deer, rabbits, coyotes, squirrels, birds, and who knows what else that frequent our yard. On a good year, there may even be enough for my wife to make some pies (he says with a smile!).

As Christians, we belong to the group of people Jesus was referring to in today’s key verse. We are the people he has called to produce the “fruits of the kingdom.” Those fruits are the works we do, and the actions we take to make the kingdom of God available to all here and now on earth. Those kingdom fruits are things like **justice, mercy, grace, kindness, humbleness** and, of course, **love**. Love is the key ingredient that binds it all together. We are imperfect people, and therefore the fruits we produce, like the apples from our trees, are imperfect. But in God’s hands, those imperfect fruits ripen and mature to become a feast for the broken, bruised, hurting, and hungry souls in our world. Just as there are many different kinds of fruit on earth, so there are many different ways of producing the fruits of the kingdom. In this season of Lent, listen for God’s direction and guidance regarding what He is doing in and through you to produce those kingdom fruits . . . and then go and produce!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, direct and guide us to be Your hands and feet in producing the fruits of Your kingdom here on earth. Amen.*

Gary Read

White Rock United Methodist

Friday, March 24

Matthew 22:1-14

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.” (v.11, NAS)

What Shall I Wear?

You’ve been invited by the King to his son’s wedding feast! The table is already set for all who want to attend. What’s your immediate reaction? “Now?” “Is my schedule free?” “Who else is attending?” “Do I need to bring a gift?” “How long do I have to get ready?” Stop!

Then that age-old question rears its head: “What shall I wear?” Something festive? Something elegant? This scripture passage describes one banquet attendee who was not properly attired. Maybe he thought no one would notice. By not dressing for the occasion, he had shown disrespect for the King and was punished. God does not care about our outward appearance. Our invitation into His kingdom is based on what He sees on the inside. And we need to dress accordingly.

Many clothing metaphors appear in the New Testament. Perhaps another is called for here. In this spirit, let us clothe our hearts with humility, recognizing His gift of salvation as one we do not deserve nor can we earn. Put on a tunic of submission, accepting His sovereignty over all. Cover our heads with reverence, honoring Him with our praise. Don a cloak of compassion and obedience, helping us to see and response to the needs of others. As Christ’s disciples, may we wear this attire each and every day so that we are always ready to accept God’s offer to be citizens in His kingdom.

Prayer: *Father, may we always be properly dressed to accept Your gracious invitation into Your kingdom. Thank You for sending Your son, Jesus, who made that invitation possible. Amen.*

Denise Pelowitz

White Rock United Methodist Church

Saturday, March 25

Matthew 23:29-39

And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' (v.30, NIV)

“Who, Me???”

The Doctrine of Discovery established a religious, political, and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians. It dates from 15th century Europe and was the basis for exploitation and conquest of Native lands and peoples even right here in New Mexico. I am horrified when I read about Conquistador Don Juan de Oñate’s savagery to the Acoma people, which he carried out in keeping with the Doctrine of Discovery.

But I don’t think any of my family participated in these cruel acts. My ancestors were not conquerors and in fact we have quite a record of civil rights advocacy in my family. “...we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets...”

Like the religious scholars to whom Jesus was referring in his series of “woes,” (Matt. 23: 29-39) I have often protested, “But I wasn’t there, and even if I was, I wouldn’t have done those horrible things!” I get uncomfortable when my Native friends share stories of institutional racism and generational trauma imposed on them by invaders. Those were “other” white people, not me...

But here Jesus calls me out on hypocrisy and denialism. Am I not part of the middle-class business and church establishment of our day? Could my complacency and fear of Christ’s conviction be as good as a murder weapon? Or at the very least, a hindrance to the societal changes needed to bring equity and justice to marginalized groups?

Prayer: *O Lord, create in me a pure heart. May I seek to understand past and present injustices and today do justice, seek mercy, and walk humbly with You.*

Jennifer Holmes

White Rock Presbyterian Church

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! (v.1-2, NRSV)

From Despair to Hope

In this psalm, the psalmist doesn't waste time with niceties! They jump right in with a mournful, plaintive, almost hopeless plea:

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!" (Ps. 130:1,2)

I can relate. I, too, have been in the depths. I, too, have needed to just cry out to God. When my heart has been hurting, my mind spinning, and my spirit burdened and heavy, I've skipped right over any words of thanksgiving and praise and gotten real honest real quick, my prayers sounding more like...

"Why, God??" "When will this end??" "How much more do we have to bear??" "I can't keep living like this!" "This hurts too much..." "Please..."

Somehow, then, the psalmist moves quickly from despair to hope--just a few verses later they proclaim, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in [God's] word I hope." (Ps. 130:5) I can relate to the plaintive cry, but the quick move to hope? Not so much...

Rather, when I've found myself in the depths of despair, I haven't stayed there *largely because of dear siblings in Christ* whose deep faith allowed them to trust in God's love and hold on to God's promises of healing--and *held all of that for me, until I could get there myself*. I haven't stayed stuck in hopelessness *primarily because of sisters and brothers in the faith* who've held hope for me, walking with me and loving me until I could return to hope myself.

Prayer: *Thanks be to God for the community of saints who surround us, and who remind us that, indeed, "with God there is steadfast love," and for that reason we can, as people of faith, absolutely "hope in the Lord!" Amen.*

The Rev. Deb Beloved Church
White Rock Presbyterian Church

“So when you see the desolating sacrilege, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; (v.15-16, NRSV)

Flee to the Mountain

Jesus is in Jerusalem just two days before Passover. He draws crowds. Jesus is in the moment—he is on top of his game. Then a cloud comes over him, and he talks of the “desolating sacrilege standing in the temple.”

Scholars agree that Jesus speaks about an event still 40 years in the future: the fall of Jerusalem in a Roman siege in 70 AD. Jesus may, already, see the seeds of rebellion that will seduce Jews from every corner of the diaspora to return to Jerusalem to fight the Romans, to make Judea independent again, and to die, miserably, when their Holy City becomes their tomb. Jews, returning from different cultures and distant places, bring seeds of distrust, tribalism, and the will for power that weakened the Jewish resistance from within. Internal discord will ultimately be as responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem as will be the Roman troops massed outside. Messianic claims, and attributions of false prophecy, are not the creation the Roman soldiers. The threats posed by conspiracy theories and misinformation, come from among the Jews themselves. The destruction of Jewish identity and cohesion in the City, Josephus tell us, resulted, not from what the Romans did, but rather from a disintegration of Jewish society, isolated inside their own walls. When Jesus enjoins his listeners to “flee to the mountains”, he tells them to flee the horrors of internal strife – not Roman legions. The sacrilege may well be a people unwittingly destroying themselves.

Prayer: *God, in this Holy Lent, give us the clarity, and the will, to see how quickly internal distrust and strife threaten the peace and unity of Your kingdom. Let us hear Jesus clearly, when he tells us to flee, not from the threat of armies, but from the treat of hatred and suspicion within. Amen.*

Selma and Bob Reinovsky
White Rock Presbyterian Church

Tuesday, March 28

Matthew 24:45-51

It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. (v.46, NIV)

When No One Is Watching

We are each a servant. What kind of servant are we? What are the priorities? There are many possibilities. We may choose to be: cheerful or dour; hard working or lazy; efficient or haphazard. Are we serving the master wisely and faithfully? Or are we wicked and opportunistic?

The servant left in charge of the household while the master is away, presumably, has responsibility for many chores, but the one job that Jesus emphasizes is caring for the other servants: "...to give the others their allowance of food at the proper time". Successfully carrying out the household duties when no one is watching requires some level of wisdom and is generously rewarded by the master. But faithfulness comes from caring for our fellows, knowing and addressing their needs, and seeing that they are fairly treated.

Jesus brands lazy opportunism, abuse of power, and wasting of resources as wickedness, and the consequences are severe when the master comes unexpectedly. But there are more subtle ways to be unfaithful: the cutting remark, the rude joke, the subtle bullying, or the unjustified branding or generalization, and these, too, bring consequences.

Perhaps we should remember the significance of genuinely caring for others as we consider our priorities in anticipation of Christ's return.

Prayer: *Gracious God, Thank You for the blessing of serving You. Keep us from being overwhelmed, so that we may serve You with joy. Give us clear vision to faithfully do Your will. Amen.*

Selma and Bob Reinovsky
White Rock Presbyterian Church

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter... (v.24, NRSV)

The Case for the One Talent

As a child, I was taught that lesson of the Parable of the Talents was that the third servant was the wrongdoer. "The severe consequences to the unproductive servant, far beyond anything triggered by poor business work ethics, tell us that we are to invest our lives, not waste them." The assumption is that God is the master in the story, and that He has placed His judgement on the third servant for his wicked deed by throwing him into the outer darkness. This parable haunted me because I was afraid that I would be like the one talent and I would be punished if I did not work hard in life.

Then I came across a new interpretation after reading Lusie Schottroff's *The Parable of Jesus* for my gospels class in seminary. The third servant is portrayed as our hero that is standing up to an unrighteous master. He acted as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He has not served mammon. He has refused to be a henchman in the dispossession of small farmers. In this interpretation, God is not the master but perhaps that Jesus can be seen as the third servant. Much like the third servant, Jesus stood up to the Pharisees and criticized how their dogmatic ways were wrong and that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. My view on this parable has changed, and it gave me confidence to stand up for my beliefs. I believe that life is more than just trying to make money, especially at the expense of others.

Prayer: *Gracious God, give us the courage to act justly during times when it is easier to do something unethically instead.*

James Ro

White Rock Presbyterian Church

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ (v.44-45, NIV)

But What Are You Doing?

Whenever I have read or heard this scripture, I would think that I need to be more aware of those around me who might be in need or be aware of how I can be kinder to the earth. As I read this passage this time, some new ideas came to mind. Yes, I can be more aware of how I can help but it occurred to me, what am I doing in my day-to-day life. How am I reacting to those around me? What were my choice words to that driver that zoomed past me on the way to work? Why am I so frustrated with that coworker? How do I handle the wait in the checkout line? Then there are all those self-critical thoughts we berate ourselves with when we feel we have failed or made an error.

40 *“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*

Yup, those negative actions and thoughts we’ve done to others and ourselves, we are doing them against or towards our King. God takes it all. The good, the bad, and the mediocre.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to be aware of all of our actions, good, bad, or mediocre. Help us to encourage, care for, and uplift each other. Amen.*

Joyce Haven

White Rock Presbyterian Church

"I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed." (v.13, NLT)

Leaving a Legacy

Jesus promised, just days before his crucifixion, that wherever the Gospel is preached, this unnamed woman's deed would be remembered and discussed. And here we are, nearly two millennia later, remembering and discussing this kindness done for Jesus. This story reminds me of another about two women in the book of Exodus, Shiphrah and Puah. They were Hebrew midwives in Egypt who chose to obey God rather than Pharaoh, who demanded that they kill newborn Hebrew baby boys. A few years ago, we were visiting Luxor, and our Egyptian guide told us that no one knows for sure which Pharaoh was ruling during the time of Exodus. We don't know the Pharaoh's name, but we know Shiphrah and Puah because what they did, they did for God. The woman who poured the priceless perfume over Jesus and the women who risked their lives to save Hebrew babies left a legacy of having done a kindness for God.

As we reflect on the legacy that Jesus left for us during Lent, what type of legacy do we want to leave for him? How can we show our love and devotion to Jesus the way the woman with the alabaster jar did? How can we stand up against injustice the way Shiphrah and Puah did?

*Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.
Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to God's holy will to cleave;
-C.T. Studd*

Prayer: *Lord, may I live my life in such a way as to leave a legacy of love and devotion to You and justice for my fellow human beings. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Julie Shimer

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" (v.22, NRSV)

Betrayal, Desertion, and Denial

During and after the Passover Meal (The Last Supper), Jesus tells his disciples what their future will be. One will betray Jesus, the rest will desert him, and one will deny him.

What were Judas's motives? Had he seen enough? Did he come to believe that Jesus was on the wrong track, disappointing, dangerous? Did Judas fear for his own life at being found on the wrong side after Jesus' death?

In the previous passage at Simon the leper's house, the disciples were angered by the 'waste' of expensive ointment, which could have been sold to help the poor, by a woman who poured it on Jesus' head. However, Jesus praises the woman's actions, and says that wherever the gospel is proclaimed, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.

Sometimes we have the best of intentions, motives, and resolve to do the right thing even though we know it will be difficult. Nevertheless, when the time of trial comes, we may react out of fear, as Peter and the other disciples did, deserting and denying.

Judas did not have the chance to recover from his actions, but the other disciples were given an opportunity, motivation, and determination after the resurrection to follow Jesus and proclaim the good news despite the risk and reality of facing death like Jesus.

Prayer: *Lord, save us from the time of trial. But when we encounter trial, give us the strength and courage to follow through, and assure us of Your forgiveness in our weakness and failings.*

Joyce Guzik

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also. (v.9, NRSV)*

Be Gracious To Me, O Lord...

Do you ever imagine that Jesus was holding this scripture in his heart as he rode into Jerusalem? What were his thoughts as he was seeing a celebration in front of him, palm branches waving and knowing that things were not going to end well? I think as a child I thought Jesus was a superhero, and I really never thought about his human status, his human anxiety. I saw him staring into the eyes of the “bad guys” you know, Pharisees, Sadducees and Roman authorities and saying: “Oh Yeah? Bring it!” I never imagined him saying to God: “Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.”

Jesus knew grief. Jesus knew pain. Jesus knew disappointment and experienced things not turning out well. Yet he knew he was not alone.

For five weeks we have gathered in community. After 3 years of not gathering, I pray you have been blessed with this gathering in the way you were able to participate, and I pray you will carry that with you in this Holy Week and into your life knowing that we have a God who understands distress, who has felt pain, and who will indeed "save us in God's steadfast love."

Prayer: *Ever present God, “Let your face shine upon your servants; save us in your steadfast love.” (vs. 16) As we enter Holy Week, remind us that we are not alone and that You have given all of us the gift of community. Show us the love and support of the community when we are in distress. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

The Rev. Nicolé Raddu Ferry
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Monday of Holy Week, April 3 Matthew 26:26-35

Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" (v.31, ESV)

The Scattered Flock

The flock will be scattered. Scattered. Scattered is a word implying so much more than to simply disperse or fall apart. To scatter is to be thrown in various, random directions. To be separated and move off quickly in different directions. Jesus did not speak of the disciples simply dissolving and going their own ways. Panic and chaos would rule their separation, and only once Jesus returned would they be pulled together once more.

I contemplate the scattering of the sheep in today's context. How far have we sheep scattered from one another? Apart and distanced, have we grown comfortable in our individual huddles of sheep, forgetting the importance of the flock as a whole? Jesus remains the shepherd, but many of us have forgotten the collection of the flock. I challenge you to contemplate not Peter's individual denial of Jesus, but the denial of Jesus that can appear in one's daily behavior. Beliefs of a superior race. Beliefs of only one way to love and marry. Beliefs of superiority because one walks with the title *Christian* and not some other religion.

We are of the same flock. We have scattered and fled, cowering in the shadows of comfort so not to be attacked by lurking wolves. But to fulfill Jesus's gospel, we must gather once more and become that flock who follows God's love and grace. By embracing every single sheep of the flock, we can finally demonstrate to others the teachings we follow and live by.

Prayer: *Adonai, help the pieces of your flock return as one, remembering the sacrifice of Your son and the everlasting love You hold for us. Amen.*

Blaire Ferry

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." (v.38, NKJV)

Praying Alone

On this Passover evening, Jesus faced the coming climax of his time on earth, dying on a Roman cross. He had shared an intimate and meaningful dinner with his friends, and opened their eyes to new understanding of what their life work was to be. Now, walking to a familiar prayer-place, they heard him ask "Please watch with me."

They just couldn't do it. They slept through the overwhelming agony of their dearest friend. He came to them three times, wanting their presence. Before the authorities came to arrest him, Jesus had thrown himself in suffering on the ground, and it was his Father who provided, sending an angel to strengthen him. His chosen friends couldn't keep their eyes open.

That is our story, too. We fail often. We are too tired, too busy, too timid, and sometimes we don't get it, till opportunities to stand with Jesus have passed. It sounds familiar, like the way human beings are. The amazing thing – two amazing things – are that these fallen, failing human beings are the very ones he loves and died for. And, the story of failing is not the end of the story.

Those friends were given the abundant grace to learn who this beloved friend was. They might have been slow learners, puzzled about the empty tomb, uneasy about the appearances of resurrection life but their beloved Jesus stayed with them. They learned it's not about us, it's about the unsurpassable power of Jesus' life in us, that brings about God's purposes. With each effort, falling short but forgiven through Jesus' might act in death, we grow in grace.

Prayer: *Dear Father, we ask for the strength to stay with You, and in You, and know confidently that Your grace-life is in us.*

Marilyn Stevens

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Wednesday of Holy Week, April 5 Matthew 26:57-75

Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. (v.74, NRSV)

What Would You Do?

Several times during my life, I have wondered what I would have done if I had been one of the bystanders the night that Peter denied Jesus. Frankly, as many times as I wonder this, the answer is always the same. Of course, I would have run away or denied Him. Then I breathe a sigh of relief and thank the Lord that those of us who live now don't have this dilemma. Or do we? Are there ways that we can deny Jesus in these times? Think about prejudice, judgementalism, or gossip. We need to hold ourselves responsible for recognizing that skin color, nationality, religious or sexual preferences etc. do not provide any acceptable reason for thinking others inferior to us.

We are also obliged to let others know that we believe that all others are equal in God's sight. I am distressed over the disunity that we see in our country at this time. Trying to understand people who are different or who have hugely different ideas may be a way to get people working well together. Speaking well of minorities, and pointing out the good qualities in frequently maligned people, is a good start. Helping each other to have respect for each other is important. If we deny one another, aren't we denying God?

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, Unite us. Help us to respect everyone and to accept each other as equals. Help us to work together with love for all. Amen.*

Lyn Olson

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Maundy Thursday, April 6

Matthew 27:1-32

Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he [Judas] departed, and he went and hanged himself. (v.5 NRSV)

Thirty Pieces of Silver

The silver shone brightly in the light. It was beckoning and was hard to take my vision away from its power. Judas was transfixed by its promise of things that could become.

This silver could also symbolize what we want or could attain. With silver clutched in our hands, we do actions. Suddenly, we realize what we've done.

We are sorry, but there seems to be no forgiveness from the people or situation.

We are in turmoil, but do not do as Judas did—hung himself.

God forgives sins "as far as east is from the west." Is our "silver" reflected in job relations, parents, words, workers, family, other Christians, and actions?

Sometimes our planned actions give unexpected outcomes, as Judas realized. Getting something you really want turns out to be not as good as you thought it would be. We can be selfish, but we can also truly repent. Some things cannot be resolved. Damage is done and memory lingers on.

Don't make guilt a heavy burden on your life. God loves and forgives. Receive His love and mercy with joy.

Prayer: *Forgive us God for seeing the gleam of silver but forgetting the consequences. Help us live the life You desire for us. Give us strength and discernment in all things. We humbly ask in Christ's love. Amen.*

Thelma Hahn

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

But Jesus, again crying out loudly, breathed his last. (v.50, The Message)

Tears

The Matthew text (read in both The Message and New International Version) describing the Crucifixion of Christ brings tears to my eyes every year.

When I read this passage, I wonder:

How can people (just like us) do such a thing?

Why do people (just like us) get caught up in mob behavior and so readily follow the herd?

Why do people (just like us) feel the need to mock a fellow human being dying in pain and humiliation?

Did no one remember the miraculous signs he performed?

Did no one hear that the Kingdom was at hand, now?

What would I have done had I been there?

I also wonder why it was and continues to be so very hard for people (just like ME) to listen and hear Christ's message and teachings of total and all-encompassing love for God, compassionate love for one's neighbor (everyone), and hopefulness and trust in God's promise.

Sometimes, it feels like the ethical and moral fabric of humanity has not changed, has not grown, has not improved one bit in over two millennia. I imagine this brings tears to God's eyes as if we were crucifying God's Son here, now, today.

Prayer: *And so, I invite you to fervently pray with me: Lord God, enable me to love You simply, as a little child. Fill me with deep compassion for all of Your children and the amazing gift of Your creation. Help me, in spite of everything, to be hopeful as we look forward to Your promised resurrection.*

Bob Kraus and Louise Hanna

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰ and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. (v.59-60, NRSV)

And Then...

It's over. Done. Finished. We had such high hopes that he was "The One". But now he's in the tomb. Dead. Nobody around but two Marys and Joseph of Arimathea. Everyone else has deserted. Not only dead, but the tomb is sealed and guarded. The body won't even be given a final anointing. The end of the story.

(Interesting that the Pharisees, who believed in resurrection, would ask the tomb to be secured)

We who know the next part of the not-finished story cannot be surprised by the next part, part of an unending story. But imagine you are one of the Marys or Joseph or one of the disciples who fled. How much grief. How deflated. Bewildered by what had just happened.

And then...

Prayer: *Lord, Let us not believe that when our trials of life seem to be at a dead end. There is always hope when we realize that You are with us always. Amen.*

David Fry
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone, and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:1-10

"He is not here; he has risen..." - (Easter scripture)

"Christ is risen!" "He is risen, indeed!" - (Easter greeting)

"Christ the Lord is risen today! Alleluia!" - (Easter hymn)

Let's Celebrate – Together!

I think it's safe to say that the focus of the glorious celebration that is Easter is the resurrection of Jesus Christ--*and appropriately so!!* In Jesus' resurrection from the dead, God affirmed and announced the ultimate victory of **Light** over darkness, **Life** over death, and **Love** over *all*! What's not to celebrate??

It is right, and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to God for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ! Absolutely! Alleluia!

And...as I read this morning's scripture passage, I was struck by a previously unacknowledged (at least by me) feature of the story: everything that happened that first Easter morning, at least according to Matthew, happened in community. A community of only two, granted, but "wherever two or three are gathered in my name..." (cf. Matthew 18:20).

The going to the tomb... the feelings of fear (and undoubtedly heartache...) the charge to "go and tell"... the experience of unanticipated joy... the encounter with the risen Christ... the reassurance and repeated charge... *It all happened in community.*

Nothing that happened was experienced alone, but together. It was carried by the women together; it was held by and with and for one another; it was shared, and it was meant to be shared with others! *It all happened in community.*

The life-altering reality and transformative power of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead were experienced from the get-go *in community*. And it is in community, still, that the reality and power are most fully expressed, most fully experienced, and most fully lived.

Christ is risen! *He is risen, indeed!* Come on—let's celebrate it—and live it!—together! Alleluia! Amen.

The Rev. Deb Beloved Church
White Rock Presbyterian Church

Food Donation Centers in Los Alamos:

Little Food Pantry at Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Outside Shop on the Corner; lower-level parking lot;
Canyon at Diamond Dr.

Food Pantry at Unitarian Church

Sage near 15th St; Bear proof collection box.

LA Cares Food Distribution

Needs money and food donations.

Tel: 505-661-8015 for large pick-ups and messages.

Donations of money: LA Cares, PO Box 248, Los Alamos, NM 87544

Donations of Food: Lg plastic bottles of Juice, Canned vegetables, Canned Meat, Canned soups, Cold healthy cereals, Healthy snacks, Mac & Cheese, Pasta other than Spaghetti, 4lb bags of sugar, Tuna or Chicken Helpers, Bars of Soap, Laundry Detergent, Shampoo, Deodorant, TP

Not needed: rice, peanut butter, flour, bottled water, toothpaste. No glass containers.

Food Drive: March 20 at Smith's on Trinity inside both doors, 9am-2pm by Royal Navy for LA Cares (see requested donations above).

First United Methodist Church: Leave food donations in shopping basket inside front door or on bench outside door. Sends food to LA Cares.

Walkup Aquatic Center: Inside front door, leave food items in barrel for LA Cares.



Acknowledgements:

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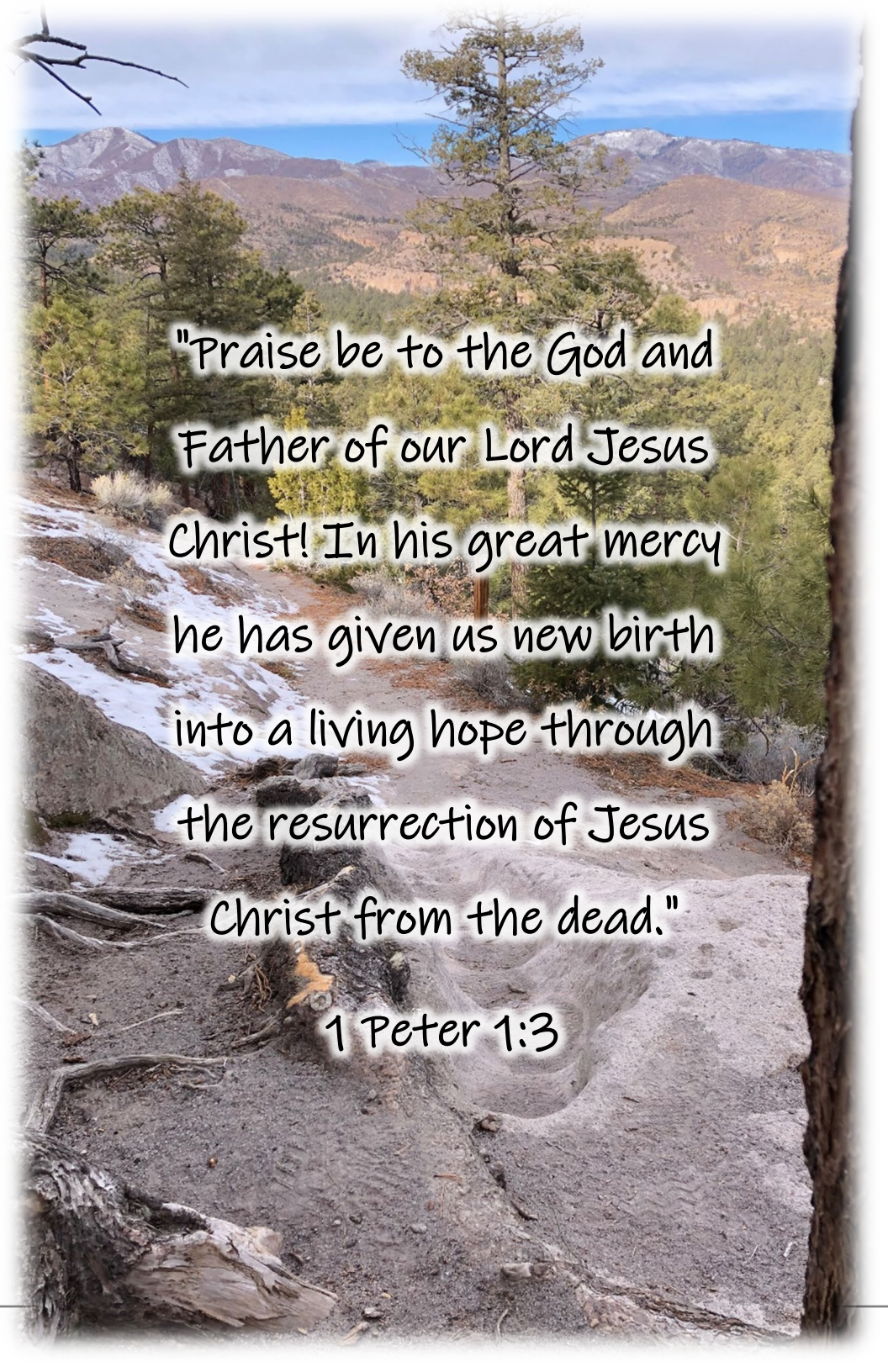
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Thank you to everyone who created all these
beautiful devotions and made this booklet
possible!

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"Praise be to the God and
Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ! In his great mercy
he has given us new birth
into a living hope through
the resurrection of Jesus
Christ from the dead."

1 Peter 1:3