

2026
LENTEN
Devotional



*Written by Churches of
Los Alamos, New Mexico*

“AND HOPE
DOES NOT
DISAPPOINT US.”

Romans 5:5a



Welcome!

Dear friend in Christ:

We commend this book of Lenten Meditations as one guide for your journey with Christ this season. We know that many of you already follow a daily devotional practice, and we encourage you to continue with that discipline. What makes this booklet special is that these daily devotions were created by folks in our six churches, people we know, those with whom we work, worship, and serve. As you read the scripture passage for each day, and the meditation drawn from it, also reflect on the person who wrote it. This year our devotion writers have selected a reading from the Revised Common Lectionary readings from each Sunday in Lent. Therefore, each week will offer us four to five reading. Readings during Holy Week will be different each day.

Thank you to our writers for sharing their prayerful thoughts and experiences that will help guide and strengthen us throughout Lent. In whatever way you open God's word, let

the Holy Spirit guide your thoughts in this time of reflection,
that you would be open to Christ's leading during these days of
Lent and Holy Week.

In Christ's Love,

Deacon Cynthia Biddlecomb
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

The Rev. David Elton
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When I was in seminary, I went to the Ash Wednesday service at the university chapel, and the message was given by one of the professors. He went through the reasons for Ash Wednesday, then said it was a holiday, that once you separated it from medieval theology, had largely lost its meaning, and so was looking for a new purpose. Basically, he gave lots of reasons why Ash Wednesday didn't really need to be celebrated, and then called for everyone to come forward to receive the ashes. Or, to do the very thing he just said we didn't need to do.

I often think of the same thing when I read the passage from Matthew every year at Ash Wednesday. Jesus says not to make a public display of what we are doing, and then we call people forward to have the ashes in the sign of a cross marked on our foreheads so that people will see we've been to church and are journeying into lent. How does that make any sense?

And I think the reasoning is about intentionality. Why are we doing this thing? Are we getting ashes to show how religious we are, or is it an outward sign of an inward intentionality? Are we taking on a Lenten practice so we can brag to others about what we are doing, or are we doing it to deepen our faith and relationship with Christ?

As we begin this Lenten journey, I encourage all of us to be intentional in what we do and why we do it, so that we can truly celebrate come Easter with a changed heart and deeper walk of faith.

Prayer: *God be with us as we remember our mortality and help us to grieve well to come apart that we might continue to be reformed in your image. May we grieve the evils of this world. May we grieve the evils we have participated in, the evils we strive against, and the suffering of those who bear the image of God. Amen*

Rev. Sean Smith
White Rock United Methodist Church

Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

God, Our Only King

What are we to make of the language of God as King in our modern times? What sympathy do we have for kings, as part of a nation that declared independence from a kingdom? And now, in our present hour, throughout the world, king-like authoritarians have arisen to trample over the rights of the innocent.

Jesus was called the Prince of Peace to draw a comparison with Caesar Augustus, the bringer of the Pax Romana. Jesus brought in true peace, born out of justice and equity, by sacrificing himself on the cross. In contrast, the Roman Empire forced other countries into submission and called it peace.

Perhaps, when we hear in the psalms God proclaimed King, we are to realize that there is only room enough for one king in our hearts. We should not put our trust in a charismatic human leader in whom there is no help, but in God, our true King. And in doing so, when we do consider our human leaders, we should judge them by that standard by which the psalmist praises God, who established equity and executed justice and righteousness.

Prayer: *LORD God, our one and only King, remind us not to put our trust in human princes but to trust in you. Give us the strength to seek after your will to establish equity and do justice and demand our leaders to do the same. Amen*

Min Ro
White Rock Presbyterian Church

40 Days

When I first read this passage, the meme of Moses being the first man to receive information on a tablet came to mind. Yes, I work in IT.

I also noticed that Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai. Take note of the following: Noah had rain for 40 days and nights, the Israelites wandered the wilderness for 40 years, Jonah gave Nineveh a 40-day warning, and Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days. Jesus ascended to Heaven 40 days after the resurrection. The number 40 must have some biblical significance.

With the help of my technology, I did some research. The number 40 can signify a period of testing, trial, repentance, and preparation, which leads to something new or a transformation. The number 40 refers to a complete time of testing in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Almost 150 verses contain the number 40.

I think the number 40 means change. Consider what the number 40 means in your life. A woman's pregnancy lasts 40 weeks - change. Doing something for 40 days may start you on a new habit - change. 40 years of age marks maturity - change.

Noah received information on tablets that changed people's lives, but he spent 40 days on the mountain near and with God. How are you being changed during these 40 days of Lent?

Prayer: *Dear Lord, May we have the endurance to be transformed during these 40 days. May we allow you to change us and shape us to be your people. Amen*

Joyce Haven
White Rock Presbyterian Church

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him! v.5

The Transfiguration

To see Moses and Elijah, and Jesus AND hear God speak?? Now that’s a Mountain Top Experience! How could that happen today? Could it happen today?

I mean REAL out of body experiences, where without a doubt you KNOW you have been in the presence of The Almighty. I feel close to God in prayer or looking out over Pueblo Canyon or surrounded by my church family. And God did speak directly to me one time about 30 years ago when I was in a 10K race focusing on my pace and passing the guy ahead of me. He told me to focus on The Peace which passes all understanding. I did and a guy with a wooden leg and a fanny pack passed me at the finish line---and I felt gladness in my heart. Even so...later on I wondered...”what if...?” The enlightenment didn’t last.

I’ve been reading about how meditation works in the brain. Parts of the brain actually receive more blood flow during transcendental moments. Also meditation practice can help block the incoming flow of certain kinds of sensory information, opening pathways for transcendence. Science says meditative states are “real.”

But to hear God speak, and say, “Don’t be afraid.” That’s what I yearn for in this Lenten season 2026. Why can’t I get to the top of the mountain?

Friends who are seasoned meditators tell me I’m not putting in the time, practice and effort. I’m focused on “me” and refusing to “let go.” My “monkey brain” always wins.

And yet. I know God is there. And Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so.

Prayer: *Dear God, Help us to wait in your presence with an uncluttered mind. Help us embrace the bright cloud in our midst. Help us listen to Jesus. Amen.*

Jennifer Holmes

White Rock Presbyterian Church

First Sunday in Lent, February 22nd Genesis 2:16-17

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Every time I teach confirmation, I challenge confirmands to read and ask questions. Then comes the waiting as you see what answers they arrive at together. Many adults want concrete answers, but in these moments playfulness and openness to the possibilities and variations on the theme are the focus. Invariably we find answers as varied as the questions.

“Why did God place the tree in the garden?” They have asked every year. The simple truth is that we do not know. But I offer this speculation: is the tree there that we might know the joy of self-denial? Are we offered this opportunity to learn that which only comes through choosing not to indulge? In the second book of the space trilogy of C.S. Lewis, the natal form of Venus, with plenty of sea foam and a scallop shell, resists the temptation. It was not a burden but a liberation. May you find yourself denial in this season of lent to be a liberation that your heart might find rest in God alone.

Prayer: *God, give us the discipline to find joy in the things we cannot have, to find peace in that which we can have, and the courage to seek after you before all else. Amen*

Rev. Sean Smith
White Rock United Methodist Church

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
...and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

CONFESSION, FORGIVENESS, HOPE

Hope is a foundational component of who we are, woven into us by our Creator God. It is a fundamental thread in the fabric of who we are as humans. Sometimes that thread is strong, sometimes it is a little weak and tenuous, and sometimes due to life circumstances it breaks and comes apart. When this happens our fabric begins to unravel and we feel helpless and, in some cases, hopeless, whether as an individual, a community, or a society.

Psalm 32 is sometimes regarded as a sequel to Psalm 51, written by David when he was “on the other side” of the darkness after his sin with Bathsheba. Today’s focal passage pinpoints the turning point for him that brought him through that darkness, i.e., when he confessed his sin to God and sought forgiveness. Before he did that his “body wasted away” (v3) and he groaned “all day long” (v3). After his confession he felt the joy of forgiveness. He turned his face back toward God and his hope was restored.

Too often in today’s world, discouragement is evident in what people are saying and the way they are behaving. But we can’t let the words and actions of the few sever the threads of hope for the majority. We need to keep turning to God with prayers for restoration of the brokenness around us; we need to keep praying for God’s will to be done; and we need to keep living the kingdom life that Jesus exemplified. This is still the world that God created and declared to be “very good”, so let us live each day with that hope!

Prayer: *God of grace and hope, forgive us and use us to help restore hope to a hurting world through your love and actions reflected in us. Amen*

Gary Read

White Rock United Methodist Church

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

God's Hope for Us

When we read that God placed man in the garden, God demonstrated his hope for man. He put us where he knew that we could be tempted and fail but he put us there anyway and without anything more than an admonition to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God believed in man, in his ability to do right. Our problem is that we are not perfect and Adam was not complete as evidenced by God's action in creating him a helpmate. Adam was the one that received the admonition from God about the tree. This story leaves out so many important details – what did Adam tell Eve? How did the serpent find out what God said to Adam? Did they tell the serpent? Was he their friend? God had hope in the people in the garden that they would heed his instructions to avoid the tree. Alas, his hope was misplaced. They did not pay attention to God's words and were expelled from the Garden.

God did not lose hope in humankind but throughout scripture we see him working towards their redemption that culminates in the person of Jesus. He held out hope for us by giving us a new way to come to God, through Jesus' example. We have a God who loves us so much that he is willing to suffer for us to bring us home. We need only love him back, be willing to follow his lead and have faith in him. He has great hope in our ability to love and follow him. Our admonitions are not any harder than those given to Adam and Eve and we have the advantage of seeing the love of God through the life of Jesus.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, You have shown your hope in us since the very beginning and you have encouraged us and provided means to draw near you throughout history. Let the Holy Spirit move among us and guide us in your ways that we may know you better. This we humbly beseech you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen*

Mark Prokop

White Rock United Methodist Church

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

Forgiveness is at the heart of the story of God's relationship with mankind. Some can be tempted to change forgiveness to something different to mitigate the psychological and moral aspects of guilt. We might want forgiveness to be unnecessary and impart our transgressions as foibles of ignorance and the limitations of mankind. Perhaps we may even consider ourselves quite rightly in a maturing process and mistakes, transgressions, as native to growth we are undergoing.

I am sometimes tempted by this reduction of transgression to ignorance and growing edges because it is not entirely inaccurate, but then I watch people and listen to the ways they interact. Thomas Aquinas in his prayer for studying asks to have the two fold darkness into which we have been born removed from us: that of sin and ignorance. When faced with two people who have been hurt actively trying to hurt one another with words or actions, the obvious truth is made known. We are in fact sinners.

Our closest relationships are often the ones that manifest our sins, our moments of selfish desire or to assert our own will to power. These transgressions can be enough to end a relationship, but there are people who forgive. It is a testament to God's grace that some of the people we are in care for are able to forgive freely and easily and thus maintain relationships where transgressions can truly be growing edges. Love keeps no record of wrongdoing, and our relationship with God is one filled with patience where we are able to err and grow.

Prayer: *Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and cover our iniquities that we might walk and grow in fellowship with you. Amen*

Rev. Sean Smith, White Rock United Methodist Church

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

As I am writing this I am listening to the *Deutsches Requiem* by Brahms. The second movement begins with a song based on this passage from First Peter, “Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie die Grass.” This piece is recognizable from documentaries and other portrayals of Nazi Germany though Brahms, like Wagner, died before the 20th century. The music sings of loss and bereavement of the world now over 160 years in the past yet not that different from our own world.

Peter challenges us to reckon with the ephemeral nature of our lives. To consider ourselves as the grass and flower that withers and fades is the work of lent. Placing ourselves in such a context might help us love our neighbor and seek justice now. Acknowledging that we ourselves are mortal can help us acknowledge what seems far more daunting, that injustice and hate are ephemeral.

The word endureth forever. As John tells us, “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” While we might grieve the darkness in the world. We are servants of the light. May the knowledge that evil will expire give us courage to “take up arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them.”

Prayer: *God of the gracious light, may we grieve our own mortality, but in doing so may we also celebrate the ephemeral nature of the woes that beset mankind. May we be encouraged to oppose injustice and hate in this world because we know the darkness cannot overcome your light. Amen.*

Rev. Sean Smith
White Rock United Methodist Church

But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Figs look very tasty. Not just figs, though, there are many temptations. When the Lord makes Adam and Eve, the Lord tells Adam not to eat from the tree of good and evil or he will die. But the crafty serpent told Eve that she would not die if she ate it. Once they saw how beautiful the tree was and that it was edible, the temptation was hard to resist, so the two ate from the tree. Why?

Adam was told not to eat from the tree. When was Eve given these instructions? Someone must have told her what God said, but who? Peer pressure, or maybe serpent pressure, was involved. The serpent urged Eve to eat from the tree, and peer pressure can be really strong. The serpent’s urging pressured Eve to eat. The passage mentions how beautiful the tree was and that it was good for food. We, as humans, quite like food, and we like pretty things too. With this combination, the fruit from the tree looked quite delicious. And so, Eve gave in. Adam did not require as much persuasion.

What can this teach us? As a teenager, I struggle with temptation, such as wanting to read instead of doing my homework. It’s good not to give in. When we are faced with temptation and peer pressure, especially during the fasting time of Lent, know that we can stay strong. We can resist temptation.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, we know that temptation is hard to resist, especially when our peers are encouraging it. So please strengthen us over this Lenten season so we can resist it as best we can and to worship you, O Lord. Amen.*

Jane Smith

White Rock United Methodist Church

All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

Circle of Life

A beloved member of our congregation, Terry Foxx, passed away recently. This was written by her and originally part of the community Lenten devotionals for Saturday, April 20th, 2019.

When I was 13, I had rheumatic fever. The doctor told my parents that if I didn't stay quiet I would die. The answer was to keep me bedridden until my heart healed. My family had just gotten a new beagle puppy we named Tux. Tux seemed to understand, more than me, why I needed to be restricted. Every day he would lie on my bed and keep me company. He was my constant companion. When I was allowed out of bed, after three months, Tux was so excited to see me learn to walk again, he was beside himself. Soon after that, Tux was hit by a car and died. I was bereft. I wrote my first story and it was all about Tux and his caring. I titled it "The Best Gift Ever."

Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 tells us we are not any different from the animals. They die as we die; they breathe as we breathe. God helps us through the trials of life. Sometimes He sends a person; other times, a beloved animal that gives and teaches us solace, love, and care. Some say the word DOG is GOD spelled backwards as dogs like God give unconditional love. We have much to learn from the animals about the circle of life.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for those pets in our lives that teach us about compassion and unconditional love. Amen.*

Terry Foxx, in Memory of
White Rock United Methodist Church

Abram left just as the Lord told him

Leap of Faith

In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, as Indiana is ending his search for the Holy Grail, he has to pass three tests of faith. The last test's clue is "Only in the leap from the lion's head will he prove his worth." Indiana then comes to a large chasm, with a lion's head opening, and he has to decide what he wants to do to get to the other side. He resolves to test his faith and steps out into the abyss, and, 37-year-old spoiler alert, finds there is actually a walkway that's painted to look exactly like opposite wall so that you can't see it's there. But it is his "leap" of faith that shows him the ultimate truth.

I wonder about Abram's leap of faith in choosing to follow God. He has had absolutely no interactions with God before this, and yet when God says go, he goes. He leaves his friends and family and sets off for a new land. And he does so because he trusts God.

I have been called by God to do new things. Some were easier than others. Some I completed, or am working on. Some I have said, like Moses did, "please send someone else." Where is our trust? Where are we willing to take that leap? Where do we retreat in order to play it safe?

What we have to realize, as Abram and Indiana did, is that God's work and God's miracles are not found where we are comfortable. Instead we have to be willing to step out of the boat, off the ledge and travel to the new lands God has called us to.

Prayer: *O God of great expectations, we know that you have a call on our lives. Sometimes it's one we feel equipped to do, and other times it's using gifts we don't realize we have as of yet. Help us to have the spiritual courage to always trust you, to step out in faith and follow you in all that we do. Amen.*

Rev. John Nash
First United Methodist Church

*If only you would listen to his voice today,
do not be stubborn like your ancestors*

Listen

We live in uncertain times. It's easy to get wrapped around the latest news of violence, bigotry, power-grabbing, and hate. We are listening to the wrong voice. In the readings for this week we see two alternatives. The people of Israel grumbled against Moses and God because they were thirsty in the desert. (But God provided water anyway.) However, the woman at the well listened to Jesus. She was Samaritan. She had no business talking to a Jewish man. But, she took the time to listen. And Jesus provided not just water but living water. So, stop grumbling and take time to listen to His voice. The living water can drown out the noise and strife of the world. Remember we are the people of His pasture the flock in His care. Such a reassuring picture: lambs at rest watched over by a caring shepherd.

Prayer: *Take time to listen to Ralph Stanley's "Listen to the Shepherd" (you can find it on YouTube).*

*Listen to the shepherd, Listen to the shepherd
calling, calling us over, he will guide us safely,
he will guide us safely, calling, calling us over
follow his footsteps, follow his footsteps
calling, calling us over, we are all his children
we are all his children, calling, calling us over
Listen to the shepherd, Listen to the shepherd
calling, calling us over, calling, calling us over*

Amen.

David Fry
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Tuesday, March 3rd

John 4:14

But those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life

Thirsty

We are all thirsty. We crave respect... love... connection... relationship. In the story of the woman at the well, Jesus has an unexpected encounter with a Samaritan - a woman - a woman who has had 5 husbands and is living with another man not her husband. That's at least 3 strikes against her. Not exactly the ideal, reputable person with whom to share his message. But Jesus does this over and over in the bible. He did not just come for the "blameless people"- he came for us all- and maybe most especially for those of us who are flawed and damaged. He makes himself accessible to all of us- no matter what!

He meets the Samaritan woman where she is - literally and figuratively. Knowing she is an outcast in her own community and needing healing. He *SEES* her- really sees her. And she responds and recognizes what Jesus has to offer her. He quenches the thirst she has to be wanted, to be cared for when no one, not even herself, could see anything of value in her.

God seeks our hearts- no matter our past, no matter what we've done, no matter our flaws. He sees us- loves us - and wants a relationship with us more than anything! HE THIRSTS FOR US!

This is Grace indeed!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, by your grace, quench our thirst for knowing you, loving you, and having a deep relationship with you. And help us to share your living water with others.*

Tammy Moore, thirsty, flawed child of God
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Sing for Joy

How many of you sing? Not just hymns while at church, but truly sing out of joy in the day to day?

I can tell you that even though I sing special music and love to sing in the church choir, I'm pretty quiet around the home and daily life.

But my son...

He's three. And he's constantly busy being busy and doing all the things in his little life, and he sings. All. The. Time. He never stops.

Some days it's the Disney *Ducktales* theme song, some days he's humming about spiders and snakes, and then some days, like this morning while we were on a walk, it's *Jingle Bells*.

Just those two words, followed by 'hey,' over and over, until we got to our front steps and then he ended it with a resounding "and men!" (His version of saying Amen.) I asked him who he was singing to and he said, without missing a beat, "God."

He sure *had* been singing to the Lord. He'd been singing for all his worth. I had to smile. And then it hit me.

Praise doesn't have to be a memorized hymn. It doesn't have to be a full verse of a song. It doesn't even have to be in key. It does say "let us *shout* aloud to the Rock of our salvation," you know.

God doesn't care if it's perfect. God cares about us, the children of God. God loves us, out of pitch and all. All we have to do is just open our mouths and release that joy and thankfulness to the Lord.

Prayer: *Dear God, help me to throw off the cares about being perfect for You and just sing with joy, in childlike abandon, for You are worthy to be praised. Amen.*

Erin Krueger

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Words and Understanding

Understanding words and their meaning to us can be life changing. Do any of these phrases have a special meaning in your life? How have they changed directions in your life?

"The tumor is benign. . . I got the job. . . I love you, too. . . Surgery seems to be the only option. . . War was just declared. . . You have cancer. . . I now pronounce you man and wife. . . There's been an accident. . . Wait for my phone call. . . Congratulations! It's a boy (or girl). . . The divorce is now final. . . You can call me Doctor now. . ."

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me." Remember shouting these words at some bullies on the elementary school playground? Today you do not hear them as it's been proven to be wrong. Cyberbullying is a vicious tool to hurt someone. Words can pierce our hearts but can also lift our souls.

Read Romans 5:1-11. The Word of God is raised above all others. His love and grace are true words that are always promised. The strength and faithfulness in this passage to the Romans speak clearly to us today. What wonderful words! May the understanding and meaning of them reach our inner being to give us joy, hope and light. Thanks be to God! No other significant words can be as treasured.

Prayer: *God, help us truly understand your words for living our lives.*

Thelma Hahn

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Is the Lord Here with Us or Not?

Moses named the place Massah (which means “test”) and Meribah (which means “arguing”) because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD here with us or not?” Exodus 17:1-7

“Is the Lord here with us or not?” I can resonate with that question. In the face of personal, national and global challenges, it is possible to lose sight of the fact that God is always with us. Jesus said to his disciples, “And be sure of this: I am with you always...” Matthew 28:20b. But I don’t see it. I’m tired, thirsty, fed up with all the hurt, anger and division I see around me. Where is God when I am in need? As the Israelites in the desert complained, I also complain.

In spite of their complaining God gave the Israelites water at Meribah, miraculously and plentifully. Enough to satisfy a nation of more than a million people camped in the desert.

Jesus went further and told the Samaritan woman at the well “If... you would ask me...I would give you living water.” John 4:4. Living water that brings lasting satisfaction.

This Lenten season let us not be people who test the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD here with us or not?”. Let us be people who “[look] to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Hebrews 12:2a. Knowing that the Lord says, “If you look for me whole heartedly, you will find me.” Jeremiah 29:13. In God, there is hope and a promise that “God...will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19b

Prayer: *Let your unfailing love surround us, Lord, for our hope is in you alone. Psalms 33:22*

Julie Shimer

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we are still sinners, Christ died for us*

Peace and Hope

I find we often find ourselves in silos, which sew division, skepticism, cynicism, and worst of all silence. No, not complete silence. Words still pour out, but they echo off the walls of the silo surrounding us. The echo reverberates and distorts as it bounces from the walls until we don't recognize it as our own point of view. In this way, we are tricked into thinking we are not silent, but outside our silo, it is quiet. We aren't reaching out to those we see as broken, adrift, or wrong. Instead, we are speaking into a mirror, and when we don't see change, we lose hope and feel helpless.

In reflecting on Romans 5:1-11, we remember that it is grace that creates firm ground beneath our uncertain feet. That grace is given to us through Christ's death on the cross. Although we are broken, He still gave himself for us. He extends His grace despite our brokenness. As He has done for us, we are called to do for others. Where there is division, offer grace. Where there is difference, extend patience. Remember that we are all broken in our own ways, all in need of mercy. Love one another anyway.

There is hope, even in suffering. This hope is not wistful thinking. It is anchored in love demonstrated at the cross.

Prayer: *Good and gracious God, we thank you for hope and salvation, even though we are sinners. Help us build bridges through your love, so that we may open our ears and converse outside our silos. Amen*

Matt Bergren
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.
(v. 14)*

Jesus' words speak to my heart well as I write this today for our collective project of thoughtful devotions. The fact that we indeed refer to Los Alamos County as being "on the hill" seems a fitting connection to Jesus' words today. The faithful witness of all these writers shines brightly off the pages for me, knowing that Jesus' very spirit flows through all of us, writers, readers, ministers, lay leaders, servants, and saints. In a world where many people "walk in darkness" Jesus has consecrated us all with his GREAT light, and we are called to shine brightly in our words, our actions, our prayers, and our very lives. We cannot be hidden, for Christ's love compels us to shine for the world.

Prayer: *Holy God, loving Jesus, comforting Spirit: Be with us all in this season of Lent as we prepare our hearts to receive you with your amazing bright light and give us courage and wisdom to shine your light brightly, bravely, warmly, and graciously to all people everywhere so that the Gospel is proclaimed through our very lives, and God's will is served with faith. Amen.*

Deacon Amy Schmuck, ELCA
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Monday, March 9th

Genesis 12:1-4

Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred...to the land I will show you...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed....’ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him....

Father Abraham and a Korean Scholar

This is it, the confirmation I went searching for by spending my sophomore year at Bible College! My burning question early in my college career: Is Jesus who he said he was? Whom or what should I spend the rest of my life serving?

My Old Testament professor, Dr. Song Ne Rhee, had converted to Christianity during his military service in the Korean War, an amazing story all its own. He wound up in Eugene, OR, at Northwest Christian College (now Bushnell University), eventually as professor of Old Testament. What a blessing to earn nine (rigorous) credit hours under him. Dr. Rhee emphasized in Genesis 12, God’s promises that through Abraham’s family/nation the Messiah would come for everyone. The Hebrew scriptures have more to say about the coming Messiah, and we know from New Covenant writings that it was by faith that Abram chose the right path for God to bless all peoples, in Jesus the Messiah.

Long story short, I found the roots of my faith. That was very comforting and defining. More incredible studies that year included History of the Ancient Near East and The Gospels. Then my year was up, and it was time to get on with life back in New Mexico, now with renewed faith, purpose and tools for continuing faith development.

As the song says, “I wish for you my friend, the happiness that I have found.... The Lord of Love has come to me; I want to pass it on.” Amen.

Georgia Strickfaden
The United Church of Los Alamos

The Depth of God's Love

Throughout the gospels we usually see Jesus surrounded by ordinary people, but in this passage we find him speaking with one of the aristocratic pharisees, Nicodemus. We know him best for His allegiance to Jesus at his death on the cross. At this point in the narrative, Nicodemus had dedicated his lifetime to studying the Torah, believing firmly that the Law contained everything that a man needed to know in order to live a good life, pleasing to God. It was the perfect and complete word of God. Yet, he perceived in Jesus something far beyond the Law; he was driven to “Interview” Jesus, in secret, probably fearing the skepticism of other pharisees. In this, the 3rd chapter of John, we read of his confusion with Christ's words, though first conceding to Jesus as being one sent as a messenger, spoke in parable-like words, which were difficult for Nicodemus to comprehend: “Unless you are born again, you can never enter the Kingdom of God.” Obviously, Nicodemus was used to thoroughly studying the scriptures, taking them literally as truth, The whole concept of being “born of water and the Holy Spirit” as the source of “new life” from heaven was strange to him. Similarly, in thinking of the Holy Spirit, being analogous to the movement of the wind—its power to effect Life, but being unpredictable, was outside the realm of his usual thinking, probably.

How many of us, like Nicodemus, have to search for understanding of scripture and grapple at times with a passage difficult to interpret? Nicodemus, who spent his whole life in pursuing in-depth study of the Law, is not (initially at least) perceiving Jesus' teachings until the light of understanding pierces the darkness of his mind with some of the most beautiful and comforting words in all of the New Testament, the assurance that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that anyone who trusts and believes unconditionally in Christ as Savior will have eternal life. How often do we need to remind ourselves that the Lord sent his Son to save the world (fallen as much of it is), not to condemn it.

Prayer: *Dearest Heavenly Father, Lord God, and Holy Spirit, we praise you for your presence in our lives, even as we find it so difficult to accept problems that seem overwhelming, Help us fully to have faith in your guidance in all aspects of our lives, even if we don't understand circumstances that arise, May we be ever aware and grateful for your love, strength, and wisdom. Amen*

Alice Mutschlecner
The United Church of Los Alamos

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

Will You Go?

Genesis 12:1-4a is familiar to many of us. The Lord tells Abram to go to a new land and promises Abram that he will be made into a great nation through which other people in the world will be blessed. These verses are so relevant to the Christian Life today. God was sending Abram and Sarai into a new land. He was sending them to be a blessing. “All of the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you,”. We, as Christians, are sent into our broader communities every day. As God sent Abram, God sends us. We are to be a blessing to those in our communities through our works that stem out of our belief in Jesus and the Gospel. This work is empowered by God. We are the conduit through which God’s power and purpose, His blessing, is channeled.

Prayer: *Lord, we pray that we obey your command to go, and that we are the blessing that You call us to be in the communities in which we live. Amen.*

Jennifer Olsen
The United Church of Los Alamos

*But Jesus came and touched them, saying,
“Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up,
they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.*

Touched

As Peter among a few disciples are drawn away from their day to day lives and up a high mountain by Jesus, they are shown a wonder of Jesus's transfiguration and visitation of their venerated ancestors. So, what does Peter do but offer to improve the real estate and build some houses. Peter, when confronted with the unexpected and unexplainable, reverts to what he can expect and explain, refusing to accept the unexplainable by trying to fit it into a framework he understands. As things get worse and a voice from a bright cloud speaks, he falls to the ground, turns away, is afraid and refuses to be touched by the wonder around him.

Then Jesus touched him.

Recognizing miracles and wonders in our day-to-day existence is difficult, and like Peter, are easier to ignore when they are seen through a lens of the mundane. So, I challenge you to find a miracle in your life today. Turn toward what is new and different and don't label it as ordinary or expected. Don't be afraid. Let yourself be Touched.

Prayer: *Lord, please touch me today and help me to recognize you. Amen*

Ann Cooke
The United Church of Los Alamos

If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

You Cannot Earn Righteousness

Our culture can be very judgmental. People highly criticize imperfections vocally and on social media. Youthful beauty is adored, disabilities and age are sometimes looked down on. Many feel political stance matters. Some churches push *being good enough* to be *accepted* by God. Who can be righteous?

Early Biblical people tried to *appease* God through strict rules, somewhat akin to other cultures. Yet, it was *not* Abraham's, or other Biblical heroes, perfection that made them righteous. Biblical heroes had big flaws, like King David's adultery and murder. *Yet they had faith and God knew their potential.* Paul, who approved of Stephan's stoning, became new. His Faith carried him through terrible trials. He knew when he was weak, God *could* be strong.

Gregory Boyle, after 40 years working with gang members, wrote *we will never be good enough to earn God's Love, nor bad enough to lose God's Love. "God's power does not reside in God's rescue of us nor in God's choosing to change outcomes; rather, God's power is found in the sustaining love that is always extended our way and accompanies us."* (CHERISHED BELONGING)

Jesus mirrored God's love. He taught his imperfect followers to treat others as they wanted to be treated and put *all* their faith in God. Jesus stated that God was behind *all* good acts he did. He told them Faith could move mountains. *Their faith was their righteousness.*

Prayer: *I believe. Help my unbelief so that I may be part of YOUR righteous Love on earth.*

Betty Smith, The United Church of Los Alamos

My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth

Blessed Assurance

This beautiful Psalm 121 assures me that I can look to the Lord for His help. My Creator God is always watching over me, day and night, no matter where I am, what I am doing, now and forevermore. This blessed assurance should comfort me with peace and hope especially when things seem hopeless.

“Watches over” is a phrase repeated 5 times in this Psalm. The Psalmist wants to make sure I get it because I often miss God’s messages to me when I am not listening or I am too busy worrying about things. I need to be still and listen, when I am praying, reading, studying His word, attending church. I need to let go and let God handle things, trust in Him, and be assured that He is my help and truly watches over me!

Prayer: *Thank you Lord for your blessed assurance, that you are watching over us, that you hear our prayers, that you are our ever-present help especially in times of fear and uncertainty. In Jesus’ name, AMEN*

Irene Powell

The United Church of Los Alamos

The Lord said to Samuel how long will you grieve over Saul?

Trust In the Lord

Grieving over Saul, a king, is very different circumstance from grieving over the loss of a significant family member or someone very close to us who has died. In my case I lost my wife who died in my arms very early in the morning due to cancer. How long does one grieve over the loss of a loved one? Or we may never get over that loss. But the Lord challenges us to live the life to which he has called us. We have been created to live our lives fully, through His grace and love. Now while there is a real difference between losing a loved one and losing a king, both situations are experiences, of loss. How do we handle the loss of someone significant in our lives? We may become depressed in the loss of a loved one or we may choose to live the life given to us by God. Now I'm not equating the loss of a king and the loss of a loved one but I am encouraging us in both cases to put our loss in the hands of the Lord for him to bring healing for us.

Prayer: *Dear Lord my prayer is that I trust in you and find in you the strength to face into the loss, to find healing and your vision for the future. The opportunities for new life exist now. Given that we all suffer losses, some greater and some lesser, please fill me with your vision for the future and the strength to carry it out. In Jesus' name Amen.*

Father Colin Kelly, Rector Emeritus.
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.
Live as children of light.*

Embrace the Light

In our dark and confusing times, it may be difficult to face each day. How do you set right the myriad things that are wrong in your life? Your day may feel as though you are moving through a miasma of problems, unsolved issues, a gauntlet of tasks left undone, with no end in sight. But in this dark despair, remember that the Lord is right with you. You have only to reach out to him to be filled with His light. Ask Him today, “Lord help me see.” Close your eyes and let His light strength of the Lord shining within you. Let Him choose the task or problem you most need to work on.

Feel your light shine from you into others with patience and kindness. This is the invitation for you today. Jesus meets you in your confusion and leads you toward clarity. He gently exposes the places where you may think you see but are actually blind – your pride, your assumptions, your self-reliance. And He offers something better: the gift of His light.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for seeing me as I am: overwhelmed, confused, wary. Fill me with your light that I might light my own life and the lives of others, seeing with greater clarity the path I must follow. Help me to see Your purpose in moments that don't make sense. Lead me today with clear sight and a trusting, willing heart. Amen*

Marilyn Lisowski
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. As He said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." So he went and washed and came back seeing.

Healing of the Blind Man

In John 9, Jesus saw the blind man, his pain, his shame, his helplessness. Before the man ever sees Jesus, Jesus sees him. And in that seeing, healing begins. I love that Jesus used the clay and spit, the lowly earth and the divine, to restore his sight. Jesus never uses miracles as a display of power, but as an invitation, to help us grow and evolve.

Yet we are so focused on rules, as with the Pharisees, that we miss what's most important. We can cling to certainty and miss the chance to be changed. Each of us in our own way struggles to see clearly. When we see others with burdens we can't understand, like beggars on street corners, it's natural to rely on our assumptions. But John 9 asks us to pause and wonder what their story might be, what wounds they carry, and how Jesus might be looking at them with compassion long before they ever look toward Him.

John 9 asks us if we will internalize Him, allow Him into our lives and grow into Him in faith, moving from judgment to compassion. Brandon Heath's prayer in the song "Give Me Your Eyes" is "Give me Your eyes for just one second, give me Your eyes so I can see. Everything that I keep missing, give me Your love for humanity. Give me Your arms for the brokenhearted, the ones that are far beyond my reach. Give me Your heart for the ones forgotten, give me Your eyes so I can see." May that be our prayer, as well, to see as Jesus sees and love as He loves, to open our eyes to all that Jesus has for us to see. Amen.

Lisa Rothrock

Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

You Are With Me

Unlike David, sometimes we choose or appoint ourselves to fill a need in a desire to serve God. In these acts, God is with us working through the Holy Spirit and our willingness to accomplish good works. Our service does not return void, but sometime we find the burden great or feel put upon or simply cannot work in the Spirit as we wish we could. Perhaps the struggles of life or a set of difficult circumstances make our service harder to accomplish, but sometime we have carried with us an agenda, our own ego, or selfishness.

In sharp contrast, when we empty ourselves, allowing our ears to hear the calling of the Lord to the work he has chosen for us, it's a different work. To empty oneself is to lay our desires at the feet of Jesus, saying, "Less of me, Lord. More of you." This spiritual practice takes a willingness to set aside our agenda, our idea of how others will perceive our workings, and to be a yielded vessel. It's not a one and done, for me. I have to keep asking the Lord to correct my heart, to let me slip away, so the Lord's work can be accomplished and the light of Christ can be seen.

Prayer: *Less of me, Lord. More of you. Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Let me have ears to hear, dear God. I pray you will anoint my service, and let the light of your Glory be seen by those who thirst for you.*

Joanna Gillespie
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

*Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”*

Lead Us Into the Light

Current events happening regionally, nationally, and globally make the world feel dark and heavy, no matter if you agree with things that are happening or not. It is hard to live in the darkness that we are currently experiencing. It doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel true. So how do we come out of that darkness and live in the Lord as children of light? For me, that answer is asking the Lord what is pleasing to him, praying about it, self reflecting, and letting myself experience his gift of light, even when things feel dark. We are all blessed to have the Lord to guide us and lead us into the light.

Prayer: *Dear heavenly father, Lead us out of the darkness and into your light. May the things exposed by the light be pleasing to you, so that we may experience what is good, right, and true. May your light shine upon us all as we live as children of light. Amen.*

Kandice Favorite

Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one

In our choir, often during Advent or Lent, we sing, “A shoot shall come forth out of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Jesse. A farmer who lived in Bethlehem around 1000 BCE. Through the prophet Samuel, God is looking for a new King and leads Samuel to Jesse. In the common hierarchy of that time, from all of his sons, Jesse would present his eldest. So, Jesse presents one son after another as a potential “pick” as the “anointed one.” Through Samuel, God rejects each one. Samuel asks Jesse if there are any others. And Jesse is thinking, “Well, not really, unless you count my youngest, David, who is taking care of sheep in the fields. But you wouldn’t want him, the last.” That’s not how God works. Samuel wants to see this kid, so he is brought before the prophet.

Perhaps fireworks and bells and stars went off in Samuel’s head when he recognized that he was looking at the next King and hearing God say, “This is the one.”

Why Jesse? And why David, his youngest? Because Jesus was to come forth from just about the lowest of the low but at the same time, in King David, the greatest of the great, the proper ancestry of a Messiah.

Prayer: *Gracious God, in this holy season of Lent, help us to follow Jesus, who is our model of servant hood and humility, not being the “first,” but the “last.”*

Joe Cox

Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.

Live as Children of Light

Before the world had shape, before light filled the sky, there was God. This reminds me that God existed before every problem, before every fear, before every uncertainty. We notice His pattern again and again. God speaks - something happens. Let there be light and there was light. His word brought order out of chaos. Light out of darkness. When God speaks, things change. Darkness must move. Confusion must settle. God formed the world with care and intention. Nothing was rushed. And then out of this light, God created humanity in His image. In His light. Not as an afterthought, not as a mistake, but as a reflection of himself. God spoke blessings over mankind. He called His creation very good. That means your life was designed with purpose. Your existence has meaning. Your story matters to God. This reminds us that the same God who spoke light into darkness can speak peace into our hearts today. Where do you need God to speak? Into your fears? Into your health? Into your future? If He can bring light into darkness He can bring hope into your situation. Your life is not chaotic to God. Your season is not wasted. And your pain is not unseen. God is still creating, still forming, still speaking.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, just as you spoke light into darkness, speak into my life today. Where there is fear, bring peace. Where there is confusion bring order. Where there is emptiness bring purpose. Help me to receive and be Your light. In Jesus' name Amen.*

Susan Sprake

Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!

From Wherever

An aviation magazine journalist asked pilots which they liked better—taking off or landing? One pilot answered: “Taking off is always pretty fun. It’s like flooring the gas pedal when the light turns green. But I like landing the best!” Since Psalm 130 is one of the 15 “Songs of Ascents” you would think the beginning would be a little “more fun” and uplifting. Like Psalm 121 that begins, “I lift up my eyes to the hills...”. But not Psalm 130. It begins, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord hear my voice!” That doesn’t seem like a takeoff or an ascent into the clouds. That doesn’t sound very uplifting. That doesn’t even sound like a landing. It sounds more like a descent from a mountain base. It sounds like a descent below sea level, like going down to the Dead Sea at 1,200 feet below sea level!

I guess one way to look at this is that when you’re as low as you can go, you can only go up from there. Or perhaps a more faith-based perspective is that this is a prayerful cry to God from the depths of a situation in life. This is an expression and prayer of trust for God’s delivering hand.

This psalm does ascend in the next verses. It speaks of God’s forgiveness, faithfulness and promise of redemption. But, like other passages we encounter during Lent, they may not always be about having “peace like a river” or “joy like a fountain” *every* day. But, like Psalm 130, they do look up to God’s goodness, faithfulness and steadfast love from any place or situation or crisis on any day.

Prayer: *Lord, hear our prayers from wherever we are in life this day. Amen.*

Rev. David Elton
The United Church of Los Alamos

*after having heard that Lazarus was ill,
he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*

Divine Patience

In John 11, we encounter a tension that often mirrors our own lives: the conflict between the urgent need to act and the patience that is often needed. When Mary and Martha send word that Lazarus is ill, they expect immediate intervention. Instead, Jesus stays two days longer where he is. From a human perspective, this delay feels like indifference, laziness, or apathy. However, Jesus's "deep breath" before acting isn't a sign of hesitation, but of a higher purpose at work.

We often view patience as passive—a mere waiting room before the real work begins. Yet, in this story, patience is a deliberate, active choice. Jesus allows the situation to reach a point of perceived hopelessness so that the glory of God might be revealed in a way a simple healing could never achieve. While Martha and Mary are mourning a closed tomb, God is preparing a resurrection.

When our prayers seem met with silence, or when action feels stalled by conflict, we are called to look beyond the immediate "now." Taking a deep breath allows us to settle our hearts and recognize that God's hand is moving even in the stillness. Divine patience is about God being right on time to do something greater than we imagined.

Prayer: *Grant us the grace to trust Your timing when our hearts demand haste. Help us breathe deeply in the waiting, confident that Your hand is working for Your glory. Amen.*

Philip Ortega
First United Methodist Church

The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’

Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’

Taking Risks

Usually, when I read the story of Jesus raising Lazarus, I think about the delay before Jesus heads off for Bethany or his interactions with Mary and Martha or Jesus saying, “I am the resurrection and the life,” or the miracle itself. But this time, what jumped out at me were the two bookend verses of conversation Jesus had with his disciples before going to Bethany—verses 8 and 16. “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”.....Then Thomas ...said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

The dilemma- The disciples are saying, “Mary, Martha, and Lazarus need us and we need to support them, but going is dangerous. Do we put Jesus and probably ourselves at risk or do we stay right here where it’s safe? They have lots of friends to be with them.” Ultimately, the decision is to put everything on the line and go.

I’m not much of a risk taker. I doubt if I could have hidden Jews during WWII or risked being arrested during the ‘60’s. Things like that are not just a little outside my comfort zone. They’re way, way outside. I can participate in a protest rally in safe Los Alamos, but don’t ask me to go anywhere else. Maybe you’re like me. If the disciples eventually could decide to take a risk like they did, maybe we can step a little farther outside our comfort zones to do what we feel we should do.

Prayer: *Stepping very far outside my comfort zone is really scary. Help me.*

Carol Mead, First United Methodist Church

*For your sake I am glad I was not there,
so that you may believe. But let us go to him.*

God's Timing is Perfect!

Lazarus' death and resurrection were Jesus's time to shine. A time for his humanity to shine and a time for his divinity to shine. He could have gone to be at Lazarus' side and saved him from death, but he did not. He stayed with the disciples, continued his work, and left it up to God's timing.

Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were beloved friends of Jesus, and for him not to run to be by their side may have seemed odd. Afterall, if we had a beloved family member or friend who was sick, would we not be there by their side? Although Jesus had the power to keep him from dying. It was not until Lazarus died that Jesus decided to go to him.

Jesus told them, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." So off they went.

Lazarus' resurrection from the dead was a witness to Jesus's power over death. Lazarus had been dead for 4 days, and no one thought he could come back to life. But Jesus prayed to God, as the disciples, Jews, Martha, and Mary all witnessed. It was with God's power that he raised Lazarus, and God would raise Jesus from death.

If Jesus had healed Lazarus and kept him from dying, they would not have witnessed how God worked through Jesus.

Prayer: *Dear God, it is hard for us to wait on your timing. Give us the ability to give our wants and desires to you and wait for your timing. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

Julie Risch
First United Methodist 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!
If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;*

Baggage

I find great comfort in these words. I carry a lot of baggage around with me—the baggage of sins committed throughout a long life. Much of the time, I ignore this baggage. I put it aside and try to go happily on my way, telling myself, “Well, that was a long time ago, and there is nothing I can do about it now. I will just try keep trying to do better.”

Recently, we have been asked to do a “fearless moral inventory,” and once more, I am confronted with wrongs going back to my youth and early adulthood. I wish there were eternal erasers or “do-overs” that I could apply, that I could tell people how sorry I am, but that is wishful thinking. I can make excuses, but really, nothing justifies the actions I chose to take. And if I am honest, I know I will continue to sin. So I do cry out to the Lord for mercy, knowing it is only His love and saving grace that help me to stand. In His word, I have hope.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, it is your grace and mercy only that can save me. Please shine your light into the dark corners of my soul and help me to feel your forgiveness as I forgive others. Please keep me from evil as I finish my walk. Amen*

Patricia Buck
First United Methodist Church

Friday, March 27th

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.

Prophecy Over These Bones

God tells Ezekiel that he will open the graves and pull the people up from their graves. “You shall know, O My people, that I am the LORD when I have opened your graves and lifted you out of your graves” (JPS 37:13). The people in exile feel doomed, and they have given up hope. The nation has become depleted and dried up in its subjugation. For the exiles, Babylon has become like a grave.

Los Alamos shares a connection with Ezekiel’s grave imagery. The town site sits on a geographic feature known as a graben, sunken lower than the surrounding mesas—notice the tilt of the Omega Bridge downward towards town. Graben comes from the German word for grave. When God promises “to lift you out of your graves,” we can appreciate the situation we are in—from theological and geographic perspectives.

God promises to “put my breath into you, and you shall live again.” This assurance brings comfort to those whose suffering has brought despair. The medium for this comfort and healing is Ezekiel’s prophesying to the dry bones. Around us, there are neighbors whose bones and hope have dried up. Hurting others has become sport. However, we are called to a ministry of reconciliation. We must reach out in compassionate boldness so that those without hope may be lifted from their graves.

Prayer: *Father, let our voices be the vehicle through which a hurting world hears the Word of the LORD. Use our breath to breathe life into dry bones. Amen*

Brent G. Collom

First United Methodist Church

I Am Always with You

God offers us assurance of hope, with no condemnation for those who love Christ. When we feel utterly alone, He provides strength and security amidst suffering and brokenness. Nothing will ever separate us from the immense love of God in Christ Jesus.

Several years ago, I struggled through a very dark and hopeless time. It was then that God gave me a promise in a most unlikely place. One night, I left home at sunset, driving aimlessly for hours until I finally pulled over and cried.

It was then, in the gathering darkness, I saw a cross high on the hill above me, silhouetted against the last rays of sunset. The descansos are resting places for weary pilgrims on their yearly walk to Chimayo. Sitting in the dark, I wrote these words.

When I stumble lost beneath the black and angry clouds,
When life's icy rain and cold become too much to bear,
And I stand alone, swallowed up in gathering darkness,
Afraid my heavenly Father simply doesn't care;

Finally, then in all my lonely desperation,
At that awful moment I can no longer bear the pain,
A golden glow begins to light the black horizon,
And on the hill His promise rises tall beyond the rain.

That night, I carried home the memory of the sunset on that cross alone on the hill. It comes back to me many times, reminding me that even in my darkest hours, God is with me. I am not alone.

Prayer: *Lord, we believe your promise that you are with us. You will never leave us nor forsake us. We believe your words, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. I am with you."*

Brent G. Collom, First United Methodist Church

Life's Pilgrimage

Psalm 121 speaks into seasons of fear and uncertainty with a quiet invitation: “What song will we choose to sing as we journey through life?” As one of the “Songs of Ascents,” this psalm was sung by ancient pilgrims climbing the road toward Jerusalem. Step by step, they lifted their eyes toward the God who awaited them. Their ascent mirrors our own. Life is a pilgrimage—an ongoing movement toward God’s peace in a world that often feels overwhelming. We face division, danger, and private griefs.

Yet Psalm 121 urges us to look beyond what threatens us and remember that our help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, who never slumbers or sleeps. Trust in God doesn’t remove the need for courage; it fuels it. Every brave choice becomes a step upward. When someone sings a protest song, they climb. When a parent releases a child into college life, they climb. When a family supports a loved one entering recovery, they join that person in the steep work of hope. Whenever we choose healing over despair or justice over silence, we participate in this ancient rhythm of ascent. Psalm 121 promises that we do not climb alone.

The Keeper of Israel watches over our going out and our coming in. So we lift our eyes. We take the next step. We ascend.

Prayer: *God of the pilgrimage, guide our coming and going as we follow our baptismal calling. Grant us courage to step into the unknown with faith. In your name, Amen.*

Pastor Kate Schlechter, MFT, PHD
Senior Transition Pastor
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

Here is my servant, whom I uphold...

The first nine verses of Chapter 42 in the Book of Isaiah appear to foretell the ministry and mission of Jesus. This favorite passage is often used to underscore what Jesus was all about. God says through Isaiah in verse 1, that this is God's "servant, whom I uphold", God's "chosen, in whom my soul delights", that God "put [God's] spirit upon" this servant, and that the servant "will bring forth justice to the nations." Verses 2 and 3 hold the lines we most remember: God's servant "will not cry or lift up his voice; or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench..."

Just spend a moment and focus on the above description. How do we know if a leader is a person of God, truly after God's own heart and purposes, when they capture our attention? We might compare their actions with Isaiah 42:1-3. So few people of influence these days truly would not break a bruised reed or snuff out a dimly burning wick. There are non-violent, gentle ways to reason with, win over, and bring justice to the nations. That is the way of God's true servant.

Prayer: *O God, your Son chose the path that led to pain before joy and to the cross before glory. Plant his cross in our hearts, so that in its power and love we may come at last to joy and glory, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*

Deacon Cynthia Biddlecomb, ELCA (retired)
Lutheran Church of the Servant, Santa Fe

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

Trust Produces Courage

Many of the Psalms are prayers for courage in standing against evil, or God's rescue from evil enemies. It takes courage to stand up for fairness and justice. It takes courage to face down evil. It is much easier to ignore injustice or to remain silent in the face of evil. Where can we get that kind of courage?

The Psalmist suggests that courage comes from trusting in God. If we trust in God's power while we are facing evil, God will give us courage. God doesn't guarantee that we will overcome evil, but only that we will be safe in God's care. Even if we are ridiculed. Even if we are beaten. Even if we are killed.

Where do the people of Minneapolis get the courage to stand up to cruelty and bullying? How dare they protest when they could be pepper sprayed, beaten, or even killed? It takes trust. Trust that standing for their neighbors is right. Trust that they can overcome violence and cruelty. Trust that they are bearing witness to the whole country.

Let us trust in God. Let us stand against cruelty and stand up to bullying. Let us speak out for justice. Let us do this with love. Love for the oppressed and love for the oppressor. And let us trust God to give us the courage we need.

Prayer: *God of Justice and Compassion, help us trust your power to guide us, strengthen us, and give us courage, especially when we are called to stand up for justice and oppose evil. Help us trust you to always walk beside us. We pray in the name of your Son. Amen.*

Jerry Kuyk
White Rock Presbyterian Church

No Problem with Perfection Here

I once tried to organize my spice cabinet alphabetically. I realized that my "perfect" system meant I could no longer find the salt. We often treat our spiritual lives like that cabinet—obsessing over the alignment of every tiny detail until we are too exhausted to actually cook the meal. Perfection is the enemy of progress. Being frozen in our call to serve others, we often use our problem-finding brains to overcome our calling to problem-solve like Jesus.

Striving for Spiritual Perfection is a noble direction, but believing we can actually achieve perfection on this side of eternity is a bit of an ego trip. When we demand flawlessness from ourselves, we are essentially trying to audition for Jesus's job. This is arrogance driving the car. Jesus is the "pioneer and perfecter" of our faith, which means the finishing touches are His department, not ours. Our task is to keep our eyes fixed on Him, accepting our beautifully flawed humanity while moving steadily toward the horizon He has set for us.

Not trying at all is arguably worse than trying, making mistakes, course correcting, and then trying again especially when we keep our focus on Jesus as we are called to do.

Prayer: *Lord, thank You for being the only one who is truly perfect. Quite the arrogance that tells us we must be flawless, and help us run our race with joy. For I want to be as like you as possible, but being you is impossible. Amen.*

Phillip Ortega, Director of Faith Development
First United Methodist Church

Maundy Thursday, April 2nd John 13:1-17, 31b-35

*⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,
you also ought to wash one another's feet.
(v. 14)*

Sand, dust, dirt, grime, sweat...
 stubbed toes, dirty toenails, cuts,
 dry and cracked skin, callouses, bunions, blisters.
These feet have walked miles between ministry sites,
 miles away from home and family,
 miles following a mystery that unsettles them.
These feet mingle with the feet of the one who IS the Good News.
These feet may often have wanted to wander away
 or run from the trouble this Good News seems to cause.
These feet are precious, and beloved, and beautiful in God's sight.
These feet need care,
 cleansing,
 rest,
 and love.

Jesus said we too should wash one another's feet.
We too are here to serve no matter the dust,
 no matter the cuts,
 no matter the dirt,
 no matter the pain.

We walk on beautiful feet that bring Good News and wash those feet who need it.

Prayer: *Holy One, we humbly come to you in need of a foot washing ourselves. We need the practice to humbly serve one another at the basin of your life giving water. Remind us of our sacred baptism into your life, death, and resurrection tonight as we once again "do this in remembrance of you". Amen.*

Deacon Amy Schmuck, ELCA
Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” Then the people as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and our children!” So he released Barrabas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Have you ever “washed your hands” of a situation? Pilate does this on a somber Good Friday. Not wanting to be held accountable, wanting to be blameless for the fate of the man who is standing before him. When I think of Good Friday, I always think of passing the buck. “Not me. You wanted this and you got it, I just gave you what you wanted.” Where in our daily lives and faith journeys do we see this? Do you pass the buck? Do you avoid or slide past being accountable? I know that I do on some occasions. On this Holy Friday, we are held accountable for the lives that we live and the moments when we deny Christ and shout “Crucify him!” Jesus sacrifices himself for us, dies in our place....today is a day to stop and reflect. This day is not business as usual, it is a day of personal accountability and self reflection. Read all of Matthew 27, reflect and pray.

Prayer: *God of Light and Love...On this day of Christ’s crucifixion, help us to be silent and look in the mirror. When there is a temptation to speak ad nauseum about our faith and the gift of Jesus without living out our proclamation, hold us accountable. Amen.*

Rev. Keith Lewis
The United Church of Los Alamos

In your loving-kindness save me.

Save Me

Holy Saturday is a strange, liminal time between the crucifixion and the resurrection. What was Jesus doing at that time?

The Apostle's creed says that Jesus "descended to the dead." Traditionally, this descent is known as "the harrowing of Hell." There are many depictions of it in Byzantine and Western art. Christ is shown, ushering righteous ancestors out of Hades, or standing over the tombs of Adam and Eve, pulling them into eternal life. A search for "the Harrowing of Hell" yields hundreds of images. Some of the most profound theology about the Harrowing is found *The Paschal Homily of John Chrysostom*, c. 400:

"Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it. He destroyed Hell when He descended into it. He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh. Isaiah foretold this when he said, 'You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below.' Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with. It was in an uproar because it is mocked. It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed. It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated. It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive. Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see."

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, by your death you took away the sting of death: Grant to us your servants so to follow in faith where you have led the way, that we may at length fall asleep peacefully in you and wake up in your likeness; for your tender mercies' sake. Amen.*

Rev. Mary Ann Hill, Rector
Trinity on the Hill

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” This is my message for you.’ ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of 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.’

What Fear?

I doubt any of us were afraid when we awoke this morning and remembered that it was Easter. Nevertheless, fear seems to be a significant theme in this Easter reading. Those guards at Jesus’ tomb had good reason to be afraid, after experiencing a violent earthquake and being confronted by a heavenly being. They were so scared they were “like dead men”. But as human beings created in God’s image, we have the opportunity and ability to replace fear with faith, trust and those words of assurance that come to us throughout the Bible and at Easter: “Do not be afraid”!

The women in this passage heard this imperative/assurance spoken twice. Once by the angel at the empty tomb. And then by the risen Jesus himself! What were they not to be afraid of? The guards? The angel? Aftershocks? The Romans? The Pharisees? The crowds? Death? And if these words

still speak to us then what is Jesus telling us not to fear? All the above and all we fear?

Or could it be we are not to fear the one thing that can cause fear on Easter Day—the power of the Resurrection! The awesome, transforming and life-giving power of Jesus Christ that comes to us this day and says: “Do not be afraid of me!” And causes us to re-evaluate all our fear... all our hope... and all of our life!

Today’s a perfect day to embrace more completely our resurrection faith in the One who told his friends and disciples... and who tells all of us who ventured out this day to hear some good news: “Do not be afraid... it’s me.” For **Christ has risen indeed!**

Prayer: *Holy God, we give our fears to you and ask to receive your power of new life in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Pastor David Elton
United Church of Los Alamos

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;
At Canyon and 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.

Website: www.lacaresnm.org

PayPal Donations: lacaresnm@gmail.com

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

Donations of Food: Nonperishable canned goods (Large bottles of juice, canned vegetables, canned Meat, canned soups, healthy cereals, healthy snacks, Mac & Cheese, pasta other than spaghetti, 4lb bags of sugar, Tuna or Chicken Helpers, laundry detergent, personal care products (bars of soap, shampoo, deodorant), paper goods, cleaning supplies.

Not needed: rice, peanut butter, flour, bottled water, toothpaste.

Please No glass containers.

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

United Church of Los Alamos: LA Cares donation bins in both Sanctuary and Christian Education Buildings.

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

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Assembled by Tjett Gerdom & Jen Robinson



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