

Prayerful Reflections



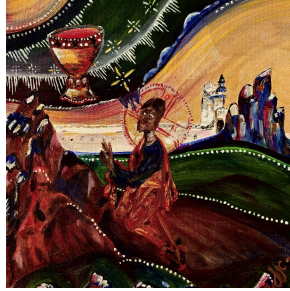
Lent 2026

Prayerful Reflections for Lent 2026

Edited by Julia L. Styles
Atlanta, Georgia, USA
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Cover art by Julie Jane Capel

“Take This Cup From Me”
2025/2026
Acrylic on Canvas



About the Artist



As an internationally selling modern impressionist painter, Julie Jane Capel explores the everyday world and human emotions by capturing the passage of time. Specifically, the ever-changing movement of beauty, justice, and faith. Art then becomes a window into her life motto: Love God. Love others. Laugh and paint the colors. Lament and change the injustices.

@JJCPAINTINGS is a collection created to be accessible – art that can easily be hung in your kitchen or living room. Art that may provoke comfort and/or conviction.

Julie has been painting since she was 14. Over these past two and a half decades, her style and subject matter have evolved with her lived experiences as a pastor, trauma chaplain, community organizer, census worker, field director for a national congressional campaign, and global traveler.

In 2009, she received her BFA, and in 2013, her MDiv (Master of Divinity) from North Park University and Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL. Since then, she has had a coast-to-coast traveling exhibit of 40 paintings on Isaiah 58. She has also been in numerous group and solo shows, selling commissioned and pre-created paintings for almost 20 years.

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Welcome to Prayerful Reflections

Prayerful Reflections is a daily resource for connecting with God and the broader Christian community during the season of Lent, the 45 days leading up to Easter. Christians around the world practice Lent as a way to meditate/reflect on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how Jesus influences our lives today.

Inspired by the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina*, or sacred listening, each daily reflection will be an opportunity to **Read** the Bible, **Reflect** on the message, **Respond** to what we have heard, **and Rest** in the love of God through prayer. This devotional could be read independently or with a community. If you would like to connect virtually, the reflections are posted daily at www.prayerfulreflections.com. Unlike past volumes, this Lent's *Prayerful Reflections* will be published each week as separate editions, emailed to subscribers and found online at www.prayerfulreflections.com.

I publish Prayerful Reflections to share my thoughts about God and uplift female theologians. This devotional features women who are pastors, authors, teachers, and community leaders from diverse backgrounds across North America and Europe. What unites us is our devotion to Jesus and our call to share God's insights through scripture. Though written by women, this devotional is meant for everyone. I extend my gratitude to all the women whose contributions made this collection possible.

I hope you enjoy the devotional.

-Rev. Julia L. Styles

Rev. Julia L. Styles is a Spiritual Director and ordained minister. She is passionate about women in ministry and believes the church needs to hear their voices—in the pulpit, on the page, in the classroom, and in positions of leadership both within and outside the church.

To contact Julia for a free spiritual direction session, visit www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com. Julia resides in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband Derek and two little ones, Jakob and Zoe.



Making Repentance Real

A Reflection for Ash Wednesday by Rev. Jessie Lowry

Lectionary reading for 2/17/2026: [Joel 2:1-2, 12-17](#) or [Isaiah 58:1-12](#); [Psalm 51:1-17, 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 51:1-17

Read

Psalm 51: 1-17 New Revised Standard Version

Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass
judgement.

5 Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

6 You desire truth in the inward being;[a]
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret
heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be
clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed
rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right[b] spirit within
me.

11 Do not cast me away from your
presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing[c] spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your
ways,
and sinners will return to you.

14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your
deliverance.

15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;
If I were to offer a burnt offering, you
would not be pleased.

17 The sacrifice acceptable to God[d] is a
broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you
will not despise.

Reflect

Psalm 51 is one of Scripture's most profound expressions of repentance — but what does that “churchy” word really mean? The psalmist's cry isn't for mere outward ritual or superficial apology, but for a transformed heart. It is not about fulfilling religious obligation, but about acknowledging brokenness and letting that honesty before God lead to transformative action.

What makes Psalm 51 so bracing for turbulent times is that it refuses two temptations we cling to when everything feels chaotic:

First, it refuses denial.

“Against you, you alone, have I sinned... I know my transgressions.”

This quote is not the language of excuse, spin, or self-justification. In moments of social fracture—violence, injustice, polarization, fear—we are often tempted to rush past confession straight to solutions or slogans. Psalm 51 insists that truth-telling comes first. Not vague regret, but honest naming: this is not how it should be, and we are not innocent bystanders.

Second, it refuses despair.

For all its rawness, Psalm 51 is not a psalm of self-loathing. It is a prayer addressed to mercy. “According to your steadfast love... according to your abundant mercy.”

The psalm begins with the stubborn conviction that God's mercy is greater than what has gone wrong. That conviction matters when the news cycle trains us to believe nothing can change.

In turbulent times, Psalm 51 widens repentance beyond private morality. The psalmist longs not just to be forgiven, but to be re-created.

And then there is the quiet but radical turn near the end of the psalm:

“Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.”

Repentance does not end in silence. Those who have been broken open by truth become agents of healing. In other words, repentance is not withdrawal from the world; it is preparation for faithful engagement.

Finally, Psalm 51 speaks powerfully to this moment because it redefines what faithfulness looks like when trust in institutions, leaders, and even religious language is frayed:

“You do not delight in sacrifice... the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit.”

When familiar rituals, policies, or traditions feel hollow or compromised, Psalm 51 reminds us that God is not waiting for us to get the performance right. God is looking for honesty, humility, and the courage to be changed—and then to live differently.

Psalm 51 is not an easy psalm—but it is a necessary one. And perhaps that’s why it keeps returning, generation after generation, whenever the world feels like it’s coming apart, God’s people dare to believe that repentance might still be a doorway to renewal.

Respond

Where do you feel most tempted right now to rush past confession and straight into fixing—or blaming?

What would it look like to pray Psalm 51 without defending ourselves?

How do you distinguish between feeling sorry and being genuinely open to change?

What habits, assumptions, or comforts might need to be unlearned for repentance to be real?

What does it mean to say “we have sinned” in a culture that prioritizes individual innocence?

If God were truly creating something new in us, what might have to change in how we live, spend, speak, or lead?

Rest

Gracious God,

Create in us clean hearts, and renew steadfast spirits within us.

Give us courage to confess where we have fallen short, and strength to repair what has been broken.

May our repentance lead to healing and justice, and may our hearts reflect Your mercy and love.

Amen.

About the Author



Jessie has served as the sole pastor at Christ Our Anchor Presbyterian Church in Annapolis, MD, for the past 10 years. She is also a Board Certified Chaplain with a particular interest in issues of pastoral care. She attended Princeton Seminary for her M.Div. and serves on the Dismantling Racism Team of the Baltimore Presbytery. She is proud to have co-chaired the working group that created a successful proposal for the trailblazing Reparative Justice Fund. [You can read more about that fund here.](#) She is embarking on her first-ever clergy sabbatical this Spring and will love having more time with her husband, two young children, and her larger extended family.

A Call to Urgent Compassion: Reflecting on God's Mercy During Lent

A Reflection for Thursday, February 19 by Rev Elizabeth McColl

Lectionary reading for 02/19/2026: [Psalm 51; Jonah 3:1-10; Romans 1:1-7](#):

Selected passage for reflection: Jonah 3:1-10

Read

Jonah 3:1-10 NIV

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion, turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Reflect

Jonah 3:1-10 reads like a one-page summary for a much longer document; few details and lots of facts. We don't need any more detail than we have: "call urgently on God, and God may relent". As I watch the news and witness the violence and wanton disrespect for human rights occurring across the US and around the world, I feel the need to urgently call out to God for mercy. If there was ever a moment for us to call on God urgently - this is it. Perhaps it's always the time.

I have wondered for a while now, do people who do not know God still pray? I believe they do. And does God hear them? I believe the answer is yes. Lent is a sacred time when we can

practice repentance and return to God, believing that God acts with compassion toward all people, believers and nonbelievers alike. Lent is a perfect opportunity to call urgently to God. It is also an opportune time to make an outward sign that we are doing so. Maybe not sackcloth, but something to acknowledge that Lent is a time to call on the Most High God more urgently than we did yesterday - or last week - or indeed, for some time, if at all. For some, that outward sign was ashes on the forehead, for others it might be a bracelet or a symbol to remind them that God is compassionate.

For me, this Lenten time reminds me that God moves with compassion. With that in mind, I searched for the word "Compassion," and one definition describes it as "the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering." That's what the King of Nineveh hoped God would do, and indeed, that is what happened. In the midst of their evil and violent ways, the people of Nineveh were shown compassion, and God did not bring the destruction he had threatened. Studies have shown that when we act with more compassion towards ourselves, we find it easier to extend that to others, even to someone we may consider an enemy. Lent is a time to practice compassion on ourselves and others.

Respond

Next time you see or read about someone who invokes a negative response, take a moment to stop and reflect: Is there a way I could respond with compassion?

Rest

Lord, in the regular rhythm of a day, put someone in my mind who needs to see that whatever they may have done, they are still worthy of my kindness and thought. Especially when I am struggling with another human, help me to take a few breaths and remember they are made in your image, too. Amen.

About the Author



After a few years in the USA for graduate school and pastoring, Elizabeth has lived most of her life in her hometown of Edinburgh, Scotland, where she currently resides. When not teaching music vocationally, she enjoys being outside hiking in the hills, drinking water, wine and coffee with friends, and watching fictional political thrillers from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and immersing herself in the written word - also mostly fiction.

Let's be toddlers again?

A Reflection for February 20, 2026, by Pastor Joy Fishler

Lectionary reading for 02/20/2026: [Psalm 51; Jonah 4:1-11; Romans 1:8-17](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Matthew 18:1-5

Read

Matthew 18:1-5

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. 3 And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Reflect

One day, you are driving your toddler around, navigating traffic and handing out snacks to the seat behind you so they can sit in the passenger seat, somewhat horrified that you get to teach your teenager to drive. Now, I love a good-spirited, sassy teenager, but I don't love teaching them to drive all that much. How does this sweet toddler go from singing in that sweet baby voice in the car to telling you, "I KNOW, MOM! YOU ARE STRESSING ME OUT," after they almost kill you while driving? Just like that, they know everything.

Guess what. We are the same. We learn some things, grow, change, make mistakes, grow some more, and stake our claim on what we know we are right about. Curiosity vanishes, replaced by certainty. We do this in our everyday lives. We pick our political party and declare everyone else as evil. We read our Bibles without proper study and context, and we become self-righteous about every hot topic. Somewhere, we go from trusting toddlers to self-righteous teenagers. I know, that sounds a bit harsh, and this isn't meant to be a blanket statement over all people, but stick with me.

Greatness in the kingdom is upside-down. You don't climb into the Kingdom, you enter it low. "Become like little children" isn't about childishness. It's about dependence, trust, curiosity, humility, and a lack of all self-righteousness. We won't enter the kingdom of God by our status or our long list of things we got right. In the ancient world, children had no status. So His words here are significant. We've become very good at having answers. We've become very good at defending our side. We've even become really good at quoting verses. But toddlers don't defend their position. They depend on their parents. And Jesus says the Kingdom belongs to people like that. Not the loudest. Not the most informed. Not the most certain. The most humble. It's okay to know things, but remember not to lose that precious sense of curiosity, because being curious is being humble.

Respond

It's so easy to point to people in our lives and think, "you just described my _____ (fill in the blank). Today's verse isn't about other people, it's about us. It's about me. It's about you. If you have any sense of conviction, step 1 is go to Jesus with it. Repent. Sit in His presence and be transformed by the Spirit of the living God. Make room for correction and connection with Jesus. We can't be transformed if we don't stay and camp out in His presence.

Rest

Jesus, we need you. We need you in our lives. We need you in our church communities, in our families, and in our nation. I confess that I don't have all the answers, but you do. I confess that I sometimes respond and behave as if I do have all the answers, and I bring that before you now. Please forgive me. Help me to be curious, humble, and a light in this world. Thank you for choosing us. Thank you for choosing to give up your life and dying upon that cross for us. Thank you that you rose again and offer us a new life, a new way to live, and a new way to love. Help us be childlike in all ways. In Jesus Name, amen.

About the Author



Joy Fishler is an Ordained Minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church. She currently resides with her family in the Sacramento Area and is the Pastor of Adult Ministry at Life Community Church. She loves Jesus, loves people, and absolutely loves raising her teenage girls. She is passionate about preaching and leading people to the heart of the Father. She truly believes that there is nothing better than Jesus, and following Him is the only life worth living. @joyfullyunfilteredandstuff

What does God See?

A Reflection for Saturday, February 21 by Sandy De Jesus

Lectionary reading for 02/21/2026: [Psalm 51](#); [Isaiah 58:1-12](#); [Matthew 18:1-7](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 58:1-12

Read

Isaiah 58:1-12, *Christian Standard Bible*

1 “Cry out loudly, don’t hold back! Raise your voice like a trumpet. Tell my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins.

2 They seek me day after day and delight to know my ways, like a nation that does what is right and does not abandon the justice of their God. They ask me for righteous judgements; they delight in the nearness of God.”

3 ‘Why have we fasted, but you have not seen? We have denied ourselves, but you haven’t noticed!’

“Look, you do as you please on the day of your fast, and oppress all your workers.

4 You fast with contention and strife to strike viciously with your fist. You cannot fast as you do today, hoping to make your voice heard on high.

5 Will the fast I choose be like this: A day for a person to deny himself, to bow his head like a reed, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the Lord?

6 Isn’t this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and not to ignore your own flesh and blood?

8 Then your light will appear like the dawn, and your recovery will come quickly. Your righteousness will go before you, and the Lord’s glory will be your rear guard.

9 At that time, when you call, the Lord will answer; when you cry out, he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you get rid of the yoke among you, the finger-pointing and malicious speaking,

10 and if you offer yourselves to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted one, then your light will shine in the darkness, and your night will be like noonday.

11 The Lord will always lead you, satisfy you in a parched land, and strengthen your bones. You will be like a watered garden and like a spring whose water never runs dry.

12 Some of you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will restore the foundations laid long ago; you will be called the repairer of broken walls, the restorer of streets where people live.”

Reflect

In this passage, the people of Judah were frustrated because it seemed that God was not answering their prayers. They had followed the religious requirements, they had fasted and prayed, but it felt like God didn't see them.

Isaiah's message to them was that God 'had' seen them, and they had fallen short.

In verse 2, God says that they had the 'appearance of a nation that does what is right.' Israel had a reputation as an obedient people, but God could see past the image they projected. Their outward actions and practices were insufficient when God could see their true motives. They could fast, beat their chests, and cry out, but it was an empty ritual because their hearts were unchanged.

Even in their fasting, they continued to quarrel and fight with each other. They oppressed their workers and did as they pleased. They could set their own times for worship and sacrifice, but it did not change their disdain for outsiders or their unfair treatment of the poor.

God could see.

Before they could claim any moral authority, they needed to repent of their own evil. They needed to be truly righteous, which inherently meant acting with justice toward everyone, not just the privileged or the 'insiders.'

In verse 6, Isaiah states that true righteousness – doing right – begins by addressing how they treat others. Certainly, it means to work toward right relationships with those close to them – family, friends, and those under their care.

But it doesn't stop there. The command is not just to stop behaving wickedly toward others. The call is to actively and intentionally work for the flourishing of others. To seek justice for people beyond their inner circle to the oppressed, the poor, the homeless. (v. 7)

During his earthly ministry, Jesus had the same rebuke for the religious leaders. He called them out for loading down the people with religious rules but said they "neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy, and faithfulness." (Matt. 23:23) He compared them to whitewashed tombs, "which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity." (v. 27)

Lent is a time of prayer and sacrifice as we reflect on the life and death of Jesus. I think the message of Isaiah is the same for us: When God sees my acts of worship, what does that look like? Am I a person who follows the tradition of religious expression, with no change in my heart? Is my practice of righteousness a matter of following the rules, or of working actively toward the flourishing of others? As I practice my theology, where am I in relation to the outcast, the poor, the brokenhearted?

What does my 'sacrifice' to God actually cost me?

Respond

This season of Lent, may we be a people who follow Jesus to the margins, whatever the cost. Let that be our expression of worship and our legacy of faith.

Rest

Creator and God, guide us to be true worshipers who live and lead in righteousness, justice, and mercy. Amen.

About the Author



Sandy De Jesus is a chaplain with the Fellowship of Christian Ministries. She serves as a chaplain in a Level I trauma center in Phoenix, Arizona.

Welcoming Discomfort & Hearing from the Holy Spirit

A Reflection for the first Sunday of Lent by Rev. Julia L. Styles

Lectionary reading for 2/22/2026: [Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11](#)

Selected passage: Matthew 4:1-11

Read

Matthew 4:1-11 *New International Version*

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

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

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Reflect

After Jesus' baptism, and before the start of his public ministry, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. I believe God sent Jesus into the wilderness to spend time in God's presence without distraction. I believe the wilderness is always a place where God chooses to meet with God's beloveds. In this situation, God wants Jesus to know that he can rely on his Holy Parent for everything he needs. After 40 days of solitude in the desert, Jesus may have felt connected to the Spirit, but he was also hungry. The devil uses this situation to tempt Jesus to change his circumstances.

Have you been in situations where you wished the circumstances were different? Every single day, I wish life were easier or more pleasant: I wish my children obeyed me, I wish people were less selfish, I wish traffic weren't so bad, and I wish the weather were more cooperative. I wish I never had to experience suffering or pain.

In the midst of Jesus' suffering, the devil tempts Jesus with the desires of the heart:

You are hungry—*say the word, and you will be fed.*

You are vulnerable—*dare to be invincible, and it will be so.*

You are lonely and afraid—*the whole world will bow at your feet.*

The devil is saying, *Where is God in your suffering? Turn to me instead.*

Jesus is aware of his hunger and exhaustion in the wilderness, yet, over and over again, Jesus turns from temptation and towards God.

"I let go of my desire for security and survival." *God's got me.*

"I let go of my desire for power and control." *God's in control.*

"I let go of my desire for esteem and affection." *I am God's beloved.*

"I embrace this moment as it is." *God is here.*

Most days, the desire for control, security, and affection, or the desire to change our current circumstances, will tempt us to turn our attention away from God and take a situation into our own hands. In Matthew 4, we see Jesus do the opposite: instead of turning away from God and relying on himself, he leans on God's character to see him through his temptation. And what happens? God sends angels to tend to him.

Lent is a time in the liturgical calendar when Christians symbolically enter the wilderness and fast for 40 days. Just as the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, the Spirit leads us to let go of distractions and false comforts, so that we can face the things that tempt us, and experience the God who tends to us when we are vulnerable.

Respond

For a few years now I have "entered the wilderness" by listening to my body and emotions rather than drowning them out with distractions. I find that when I welcome my emotions, especially negative ones, they lose their hold on me, and I can recognize the temptations behind them. I do this through a practice called the Welcoming Prayer. The Welcoming Prayer is a method of consenting to God's presence and action in our physical and emotional reactions to events and situations in daily life. The purpose of the Welcoming Prayer is to deepen our relationship with God by consenting to the ordinary activities of our day.

The process of the welcoming prayer looks like this:

1. Feel and sink into what you are experiencing in your body right now.
2. Welcome what you are experiencing this moment in your body as an opportunity to consent to the Divine Indwelling.
3. Let go by saying, "I let go of my desire for security, affection, control, and embrace this moment as it is."

This week, practice *The Welcoming Prayer* in small moments of frustration, for instance, when you are stuck in traffic or find yourself irritated with a coworker or family member. As you

practice feeling negative emotions in small situations, you will become better at accepting them in bigger moments.

To learn more about The Welcoming Prayer, visit [Contemplative Outreach](#).

Rest

In this moment, take a moment to check in with your body and your emotions.

Take a few deep breaths and recognize how you are feeling.

Welcome what you are feeling with the following prayer:

“Welcome, welcome, welcome.

I welcome everything that comes to me today because I know it's for my healing.

I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.

I let go of my desire for power and control.

I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval, and pleasure.

I let go of my desire for survival and security.

I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person, or myself.

I am open to the love and presence of God and God's action within. Amen.”

-The Welcome Prayer as written by Father Thomas Keating

About the Author



Rev. Julia L. Styles is a Spiritual Director and ordained minister. She is passionate about women in ministry and believes the church needs to hear their voices—in the pulpit, on the page, in the classroom, and in positions of leadership both within and outside the church.

To contact Julia for a free spiritual direction session, visit www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com.

Julia resides in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband Derek and two little ones, Jakob and Zoe.

“It’s too much!”

A Reflection for Monday, February 23 by Rev. Kelly Johnston

Lectionary reading for 2/23/2025: [Psalm 32; 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 1 Kings 19:1-8

Read

1 Kings 19:1-8 *NIV*

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” 5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 6 He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” 8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

Reflect

A mighty man of God, who has clashed with the evil powers in his community and comes out proving the power of God, collapses in despair under the one spot of shade he can find in the desert beyond the battlefield. Only a day earlier, this zealous prophet on a mission from God had called down fire from heaven. Just one day prior, Elijah had prayed confidently: *“O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.”* (1 Kings 18:36-37, NLT) He shouted his gutsy prayer before a huge audience. God answered boldly, and everyone was amazed.

One day later, his prayer had changed. He no longer lifts his arms with confidence. There is no strength left in his body, the audience is gone, and his prayer is simply: *“I have had enough, Lord.” I’m done. I don’t have anything left. God, it’s too much. Too much. Too much.*

The Clark Sisters' classic song comes to mind - the one that asks, "*is my living in vain?*" Whether it is health challenges, the struggles of ministry, the overwhelm of current events, or something else, many of us come to a point where we have little left to pray except: *It's too much, God. What is the point? I've given so much, and yet "the days are evil"* (Eph. 5:16).

Elijah's prayer is still a prayer. It is still a cry to the God who has called him, the God who has fed him in the wilderness and is about to do it again. A cry of desperation is still heard by God as a summons, and God shows up.

For Elijah, God shows up by sending an angel, who literally wakes him up to provide food and water. After another stretch of sleep, the angel (now clarified in the text as *from the Lord*) feeds Elijah again, but also has words for this weary servant. The angel's words actually echo Elijah's: "It is too much." And these words of validation are again accompanied by the sustenance needed for what comes next.

Whatever God has called us to, it will involve moments of glory and triumph, but alongside those moments, sometimes within a matter of hours, we will also experience desperation, exhaustion, and anxiety. The story of this mighty man of God reminds us that being a zealous and powerful servant of the Lord sometimes looks like this: running away, flopping down in the shade, and praying an honest prayer of lament to God. And, in the midst of that desperate surrender, we must be on the lookout for angels who come and attend us (see Matt. 4:11 and Psalm 91:11-12).

It's okay to pray, "I've had enough". It's okay to lay down in weary desperation. That just might be the best place for us to meet God and receive divine validation, sustenance, and guidance.

Respond

Depending on how this story hits you today, here are a few ways you might respond:

- Go outside (maybe bring a blanket?) and lie down. Let yourself "rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1) and pray an honest prayer to El Roi, the God who sees you (Gen. 16:13). It may be as simple as Elijah's prayer, "I've had enough, Lord."
- Journal about the highs and lows for you right now. Have you been fighting hard? Where has it become too much? Where has God shown up to provide? Name it and hold it before God in prayer.
- Listen to The Clark Sisters' "Is My Living in Vain?" and sing the answer out loud: "No! Of course not! Up the road is eternal gain!"

Rest

God who sees, in my weariness and wilderness, I lay myself down in the shade you provide. I rest in your shadow and abide in your presence. Send me an angel, Lord, to help me on my way, because this journey is just too much sometimes. Help me get up and walk with the strength you provide. Amen.

About the Author



Kelly Johnston is a Covenant pastor currently living and serving in the western suburbs of Chicago. She loves to cook, read, create, and spend time outside - either exploring with her kids, working in the garden, or, if she's really lucky, on a backpacking trip with her husband. She is a cancer survivor, thankful to God for every moment of life.

Sin is Lying at the Door

A Reflection for Tuesday, February 24 by Sara Simonds

Lectionary reading for 02/24/2026: [Psalm 32](#); [Genesis 4:1-16](#); [Hebrews 4:14-5:10](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Genesis 4:1-16

Read

Genesis 4:1-16 KJV

1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. **2** And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. **3** And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. **4** And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: **5** But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. **6** And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? **7** If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. **9** And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? **10** And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. **11** And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; **12** When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. **13** And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. **14** Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. **15** And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. **16** And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

Reflect

The story of Cain and Abel is one I have heard my whole life, and as a mother, it stands out in the raising of two children. As a child, I surely did not read or fully understand the words that are written in the Bible or the full weight of the sin that Cain committed- killing his own brother and then lying to God. As a mother, now when I read verse 10, "And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." I can feel the anguish in God's voice, and I also wonder about the stories in the Bible where God speaks directly to individuals.

How many times in our lives have we looked up to the heavens and said, “What now, God?” “Why me, God?” What would it be like to get a message directly from God? In the case of Cain, it would be a scary message, a feeling that you will be haunted the rest of your days because of the sin that you have committed, and what God is showing even when Cain brings his offering, is that this sin has been lying in wait for Cain, lying at his door waiting for him. It feels like sin is at our door so many times in our lives, waiting for us. This story reminds us that there is evil in the world, and the overall story of Genesis reminds us that there always has been.

How can we have a pure heart and not sin against God when you read about Adam and Eve and then Cain and Abel, and then on and on? The warning God gave to Cain was a chance to correct his attitude before committing the greater sin of murder, and the underlying message is that it is not always your actions that truly matter, but your thoughts and your purpose in those actions. The importance of our inner attitude feels at once freeing and alarming to me, and I am reflecting on it during these first 100 days of 2026. How do I truly make the time and space for God in my heart? How do I show that I am not too busy or too important to listen when God speaks? I do not expect a burning bush or a message directly from God as Cain received, but in this time in our world, I am hopeful that we can all recognize the need to slow down and listen for God where we can.

Respond

Take the time to listen to God in your daily life. Identify areas where you are rushed, and sin is crouching at your door or lying at your door waiting for you, and pray for strength during those times to pray and listen to God.

Rest

Lord, during this time of Lent help us to make the time to rest and to think about the lessons around us every day. From Cain's original sin in Genesis to the sins we see in the world today, there are many ways we can learn, grow, and empathize with others. Help us to use this time to reflect and reset as we pray throughout Lent and remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. Amen.

About the Author



Sara Simonds is a mother and wife in the Atlanta area who is an active member at Shallowford Presbyterian Church. She is a recovering corporate working mom and is using this time to read the bible, reflect on the impact of religion in her life, and enjoy a slower pace as much as she can with two small children.

The Shepherd and the Lost Sheep: A Lesson in Grace

A Reflection for Wednesday, February 25 by Rev. Bronwyn Murphy

Lectionary reading for 02/25/2026: [Psalm 32](#); [Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28](#); [Matthew 18:10-14](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Matthew 18:10-14

Read

Matthew 18:10-14 (NIV)

¹⁰“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹¹”

¹²“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

Reflect

When my children were a bit younger, they loved building with Legos. In our dining room, we still have a table that memorializes some of their larger, complex creations. These days, completed creations still get added, but at a slower pace than before. Legos have brought so much joy to our household. And they've also brought a lot of drama. On more than one occasion, one of my children will be working on a build with hundreds and hundreds of pieces when everything suddenly goes catastrophically wrong. It doesn't look like a crisis from the outside because the near-completed build looks fantastic.

All goes awry when it is discovered that one Lego piece is missing. Of the hundreds and hundreds of pieces, one is lost and must be found to complete the build. Through tears and frantic searches under the couch, in trash cans, in the deep grooves of the carpet, and in the vacuum canister, the piece is found. Relief. Celebration. The build can go on; all is well. It is similar to the parable of the wandering sheep in Matthew 18:10-14. There are 100 and one goes astray. 99 remain. A 99% retention rate of the flock is impressive. It's near perfect. Yet, the shepherd goes after the lost sheep, because all by itself, it's in grave danger.

By itself, the sheep remains exposed, unprotected, and vulnerable to predators. A single sheep is ill-equipped to survive without a shepherd, without a flock. So the shepherd searches for the one. Every sheep matters to the shepherd. Because of the love and care the shepherd shows to his sheep, none are expendable. There is not one he could live without. When a sheep goes astray, the shepherd does not beat it with a staff when it is found. The shepherd doesn't berate

the sheep for separating from the flock. Instead, the shepherd celebrates when the lost sheep is found.

This is grace: that the lost sheep is sought out by the shepherd. This is grace: that we are sought out by the Shepherd, who yearns to restore what is lost. The truth is, we get lost sometimes. We are all following someone or something. Maybe we are following a person, a status, or an ideology that has taken us away from following God, the Good Shepherd. In God's good grace, He seeks us out, even when we forge ahead on our own path.

Just like searching for the teeniest, tiniest Lego piece, it is important for the creator to find what was lost and rejoice when what was lost has been found.

Respond

Where do you wander? Why do you wander? What dangers may lie in wait when you stray away from the Good Shepherd? Wandering may not be calculated or intentional, perhaps a series of actions and decisions that, over time, put distance between you and God. Open yourself to being found and celebrated by the shepherd.

Rest

God, thank you that you care deeply for us. You are the Good Shepherd. Thank you for your grace and mercy when we stray from the flock—that you seek us out because even one sheep missing is one too many. Thank you for your persevering love for us, your flock. Amen

About the Author



Rev. Bronwyn Murphy serves in children and youth roles in two Covenant churches near Sacramento, CA. She also serves as a Chaplain Resident at a regional hospital in Northern California. Bronwyn has been married to Jarrod for over 20 years. They have three children, all of whom join Bronwyn and Jarrod in cheering for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Prayers that Transcend Generations

A Reflection for Thursday, February 26 by Rebekah Bolin

Lectionary reading for 02/26/2026: [Psalm 121](#); [Isaiah 51:1-3](#); [2 Timothy 1:3-7](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Read

2 Timothy 1:3-7, NIV

³ I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴ Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

Reflect

The journey of faith is larger than we could ever imagine. It goes beyond ourselves. Yes, our faith is personal, but it is also profoundly communal. The ways God acts in our lives is often the result of many prayers—including many prayers from people we would never even know about. I sometimes wonder if God is answering prayers in my life that my ancestors prayed several generations before I was even born.

There are glimpses of this idea in these verses. First, Paul is writing to his mentee, Timothy, and revealing how much he prays for him. Yes, Timothy knows some of these prayers (as referenced in the verses), but not all. I have to believe God is acting in Timothy's life in some way due to Paul's prayers and the prayers of his mother, grandmother, and others in his life. Prayers that Timothy would never even know about.

In the midst of Paul's prayers for Timothy, he writes to encourage him to live out the God-given gifts within him. Gifts that Paul prayed over him. And with this knowledge, to live his life with the power, love, and self-discipline of the Holy Spirit.

In dark times of the world and in personal struggles of isolation and loneliness, it is important to remember that we are part of something larger. Our faith and the prayers for us can be traced back through generations. The same Spirit which breathed into Adam and Eve, Abraham and David, the twelve apostles, Paul and Timothy, is the same Spirit breathing into us. This is the same Spirit that gives us the strength to live in God's power, love, and self-discipline. There are people, some of whom you may or may not know, who have prayed this over you. You and I are a result of generations of prayers. And as we pray for our family, friends, communities, and the

world, may you take solace in knowing your prayers are powerful and effective. Through you, God's Spirit has the power to transform lives for generations to come.

Respond

1. Meditate on how people have prayed for you.
2. Take a moment to thank God for all the prayers lifted up on your behalf.
3. Ask God to reveal who to pray for at this moment. And take some genuine time to pray for that person and/or people. Pray a blessing over them. Pray they would have a deeper understanding of living in God's power, love, and self-discipline. Pray for comfort, joy, and peace that transcends all understanding over their life/lives.

Rest

Lord, thank you for the prayers over my life, many of which I am unaware of. Bless those who have prayed over me and my life. Lord, may I continue to lift up prayers for others. May I have a clear understanding of our connectedness through you? As I pray with your power, love, and self-discipline, may my prayers for others have a generational impact. I love you, amen.

About the Author



After growing up in Wisconsin, Rebekah graduated from Fuller Seminary and has lived in Los Angeles since 2006 (minus a year and a half of living on the Big Island of Hawaii). In 2018, she started and pastored a church in Downtown LA. The church has been on hold since COVID, but the vision remains strong, and she hopes to eventually resume operations. Until then, she is traveling while working for a major U.S. airline. In her free time, she loves to travel, hike, assemble jigsaw puzzles, try new foods, play soccer, laugh around the dinner table with family and friends, and enjoy the adventures of life the Lord leads her on.

The Saving Grace of Easter

A Reflection for Friday, February 27 by Jessica deLinde Dyckman

Lectionary reading for 2/27/2026: [Psalm 121](#); [Micah 7:18-20](#); [Romans 3:21-31](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Romans 3:21-31

Read

Romans 3:21-27(NLT)

21 *“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses[a] and the prophets long ago.*

22 *We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.*

23 *For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. **24** Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. **25** For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, **26** for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.*

27 *Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. **28** So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.”*

Reflect

“We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.” Romans 3:22

Praise the Lord that we can say ‘Yes and Amen’ to this beautiful truth! This Bible verse helps unlock the entire Gospel and the saving grace of Easter. This is why we observe Lent, why we believe in Jesus Christ as the Sacrificial Lamb, and how we can be made right with our Creator.

Through faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the prophesied Savior, God made a way for all people to come to Him to find hope and salvation in eternal life.

Then the passage goes on to say, *“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. 24 Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” Romans 3:23-24*

Everyone has sinned, and our sin separated us from a perfect God. A God who is Holy of Holies, who Was and Is, and Is to Come, and who is Magnificent, Unimaginable, Glory of Glory, Awesome, and Mighty. One whose presence cannot bear sin.

As humans, we were made for a perfect relationship with God, as He created us in His image (Imago Dei) and for His communion and glory (Genesis 1-3). Our sin separates us from that perfect harmony of community with our Creator.

In order to be near God, sin requires a blood sacrifice. In the Ancient Days, sin was atoned (made right) by the blood of animals. But the blood of animals would only cover so much sin, and only last so long before another sacrifice needed to be made.

The Lord longed for humankind to be in community with Him like it once was in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3). The only way to forever restore our relationship with God was through an eternal, perfect sacrifice: Jesus Christ.

The only One to fulfill that role was God himself, through the holy trinity, in the flesh as God the Son, Jesus Christ. Fully God and fully human, Jesus lived a perfect life on earth without any sin.

He did not deserve death on the cross, but willingly gave up His life. His death was a sacrifice to God to cover the sins of all mankind once and for all, making a way for humans to restore and have a right relationship with God the Father (John 3:16-18). Jesus Christ was (and is!) the sacrificial, perfect lamb for us.

Three days after His death on the cross, Jesus came back to life! Christ’s resurrection gives us hope and life after death and truly reconciles us to God. He defeated sin, death, shame, and eternal separation forever!

After Jesus rose from the grave, He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father, where He waits for His second coming to earth. Where then He will reign as the true Messiah and King of Kings (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) forever and ever.

This is the Easter story, and this is our hope!

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” Romans 10:9-10 NIV

Respond

The Lenten and Easter seasons are a beautiful rhythm to our Christian faith. If you haven't put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Messiah and Savior, would you consider what you have just read?

If you are already a Christ follower, who would you consider someone who needs to hear the hope of Easter? Would you consider inviting them to church on Easter Sunday?

Rest

Heavenly Father, thank you for your faithfulness! Thank you for devising a rescue plan for our reconciliation. We praise you for the hope of Jesus Christ in this Easter season. We love you, and trust in your faithfulness for the future! Amen.

About the Author



Jessica lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and their two children and is deeply involved in her faith community. Grounded in faith and family, she is an author and speaker who loves teaching, engaging with the community, and celebrating life with intention.

I Lift Up My Eyes to the Hills

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, February 28 By Rev. Oron K. Trickey

Lectionary Reading for 2/28/2026: [Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 121

Read

Psalm 121 - New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?	the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.	6 The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.
3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.	7 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
4 He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.	8 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.
5 The Lord is your keeper;	

Reflect

For many of us, Lent is a season of inward focus and reflection, taking inventory of our souls, our discipleship, and our lives. In a perfect world, setting aside one of our usual daily pleasures would help us be less distracted and better focus on how we are really doing at our core. This is a valuable process that creates opportunities for healing and transformation.

But it can also lead to our being a little too self-absorbed. Yes, in one sense, this is all about our plunging into the shadows of Lent in preparation for the light of Easter. Of owning our stuff, coming clean to ourselves and to God. Of opening up in new ways to who we can be as followers of Jesus.

At the same time, a sense of spiritual balance is needed.

Psalm 121 offers a helpful perspective on our Lenten experience. As we look inward, we also look upward. We lift up our eyes and see all that God is and all that God does for us. To allow the Lord to keep us in the midst of our Lenten experience. (Note that the word “keep” is used six times in this short Psalm.)

Lent is not just about us being alone in dealing with our stuff; it’s about walking with our God and partnering together towards transformation.

Respond

Read through Psalm 121 three times, slowly, section by section.

Pause between each section and invite God to show you how God is keeping you today and in this season of Lent.

Rest

Keeper God, please give me the faith and trust that you are indeed with me, keeping me as I seek to bring my darkest failings and frailties into Your light. Help me to rest in your power to stay with me and see me through this season, to help me, heal me, grow me, and lead me toward Resurrection. Amen.



About the Author

A longtime Chicago resident, Oreon is a seasoned urban ministry practitioner, spiritual director, retreat facilitator, and Enneagram consultant. She plays a mean blues guitar, loves to laugh deeply, and appreciates a serious cup of coffee. @oreont

The Call to a Larger Life

A Reflection for the Second Sunday of Lent by Rev. Dr. Laura Truax

Lectionary reading for 03/01/2026: [Genesis 12:1-4a](#), [Psalm 121](#), [Romans 4:1-5, 13-17](#), [John 3:1-17](#) or [Matthew 17:1-9](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Genesis 12:1-3

Read

Genesis 12:1-3 NRSV

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him.

Reflect

The other day, I went into Subway and ordered what I always order at Subway: *Spicy Italian. On wheat.* I can't remember the last time I changed up my menu order. I went home by the route I generally take. I made a dinner for guests—a sheet-pan supper of marinated shawarma chicken—that is in my regular rotation. I called it a day and went to bed at roughly the same time I generally retire. A regular day.

Not all my days are routine. But the vast majority are. I bet yours are too.

There is that well-known story about how Albert Einstein kept his wardrobe simple: 4 black pants, 4 black shirts. He didn't want to waste any energy on small decisions. I like to think that much of my routine is motivated by something similar. I want to give my best energy to a higher ordering of things. You too, perhaps?

This is the sensitivity I bring to the great call of Abraham story found in our text of Genesis 12. It shares similarities with various "Call" stories in literature. An individual is addressed by a power or a person beyond themselves. That voice invites them on an unknown journey (Abraham in Genesis 12) or on an unknown way of living (as Jesus with Nicodemus in John). The divine invitation is sometimes accompanied by a warning: "You will go where you don't want to go," as Jesus told Peter in John 21:18. The call even extends to Jesus himself, as he wrestles with its implications: "*Let this cup pass from me!*" in Matt. 26:39. They are all invitations to a larger life. The clear and uncompromising reality in all these passages is that the life we long for requires us to walk unknown paths and make *uncomfortable choices*. Life with God in the Spirit demands a certain *unknowing* on our part. A particular *surrender to choices* that are not our own.

Last week, I followed a nudge and texted a family member I hadn't spoken to since January 2020. We have some different views, and I needed some space. But recently I became aware that my space was just run of the mill routine. I was operating in my comfort zone.

We have started a dialogue. It's uncharted territory in some ways. And that's the point. Sure, this is a small action. But it's gotten me thinking about something that would be pretty big for me: offering our little coach house as a sanctuary to a landscaper I know. I don't know what will come of that either, but I sense it is another nudge. I want to be where God is calling me. That is what Abraham wanted, too. He left everything he knew to follow.

Respond

Listen. Get still enough to feel what is uncomfortable in you. Sense what is unknown and scary. When you feel the nudge to move, then do so.

Rest

We give you habits, our routines, our comfortable ways, and our well-considered opinions. We hand over our established views, our curated books, and our rich circles of friends. Take us to the unknown. Lead us to the places where you want us to stretch out and offer shade.



About the Author

Laura Sumner Truax is a writer, a minister, and increasingly, a socially engaged citizen grounded in the practices of centering prayer and meditation. She leads an online daily practice on the [Meditation Chapel platform](#). She is a theologian-in-residence at the virtual upstart Olive Tree community and a member of the [Red Letter Christians](#) community. Laura posts on Facebook, and Instagram [@freerangechristian](#)

Being with God in Our Discontent

A Reflection for Monday, March 2 by Tori Mack

Lectionary reading for 03/02/2026: [Psalm 128](#); [Numbers 21:4-9](#); [Hebrews 3:1-6](#);

Selected passage for reflection: Numbers 21:4-9

Read

Numbers 21:4-9 NRSV

⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom, but the people became discouraged on the way. ⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." ⁶ Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole, and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Reflect

Life is not always easy. Seasons of discontent come. It is the season I have found myself in. I'm not sure how I got here, but it's here. The things that used to be a part of my rhythm are now irritating me, and if I'm honest, starting to feel like drudgery. As I read this passage, I resonated with the Israelites. They have been journeying with God and are growing weary. Suffice it to say that their relationship with the Edomites is "complicated" so they are taking the long way around the land of Edom. Their impatience grows in the wilderness, with no food and no water. Complete discontentment among the people is so great that God hears of it and responds by sending a poisonous snake. This is not the ideal response that someone would want from God.

I want God to do something else about my discontentment, not that! This response brings me awareness that God notices my discontent. Periods of discontent can be seen as an invitation to notice when we have gone too far. My grumbling is not appreciated. Rather, it is a distraction from the bigger goal. Why are people told to look at the poisonous snake and receive life? I wonder if this is a way for them to recenter their thoughts and minds on what is more important—obedience and trust in God. I can't say for certain, but my childhood taught me that there was nothing like the sting of a punishment to remember why a different path is not worthwhile. But as a parent, I also understand that the effect of consequences can offer healing and growth.

Discomfort can be an invitation to grow or change. Rather than resist or ignore the discomfort, take this season of Lent to lament.

Respond

This season of Lent offers us space to sit with our discontentment. I offer some questions that may guide you in this season.

- Are there areas of your life that feel spiritually dry or stagnant?
- Can you pinpoint when you first started feeling this-what was happening in your life?
- Can you trust God's presence with you in this season?

Rest

Holy One, You are the God of all seasons. When I am feeling empty, I trust you to fill me with hope. When I feel lost, may I feel your presence. Help me to trust you to be with me in joy, sorrow, melancholy, or discontent. Amen.

About the Author



Tori Mack is a spiritual director who is passionate about accompanying people on their journey with the Divine. If you're looking for her, you can email her at mrsytmack@gmail.com or find her on a train in search of her next museum adventure.

God is creating – Pay Close Attention Now!

A Reflection for March 3 by Rev. Dr. Cynthia P. Stewart

Lectionary Readings: [Psalm 128](#); [Isaiah 65:17-25](#); [Romans 4:6-13](#)

Selected passage for today's reflection: Isaiah 65:17-25

Read

Isaiah 65:17-25 – Message Bible

New Heavens and a New Earth

¹⁷⁻²⁵ "Pay close attention now:

I'm creating new heavens and a new earth.

All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten.

Look ahead with joy.

Anticipate what I'm creating:

I'll create Jerusalem as sheer joy,

create my people as pure delight.

I'll take joy in Jerusalem,

take delight in my people:

No more sounds of weeping in the city,
no cries of anguish;

No more babies dying in the cradle,
or old people who don't enjoy a full lifetime;

One-hundredth birthdays will be considered normal—

anything less will seem like a cheat.

They'll build houses

and move in.

They'll plant fields

and eat what they grow.

No more building a house

that some outsider takes over,

No more planting fields

that some enemy confiscates,

For my people will be as long-lived as trees,
my chosen ones will have satisfaction in their work.

They won't work and have nothing come of it,

they won't have children snatched out from under them.

For they themselves are plantings blessed by God,

with their children and grandchildren likewise God-blessed.

Before they call out, I'll answer.

Before they've finished speaking, I'll have heard.

Wolf and lamb will graze the same meadow,
lion and ox eat straw from the same trough,

but snakes—they'll get a diet of dirt!

Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill

anywhere on my Holy Mountain,"

says God.

Reflection



I was visiting the Art Institute of Chicago this past weekend, and these two images stood out the most as I began to reflect on Lent and the scripture for today.

Take a moment to look at the two pictures and write down words or thoughts that come to mind. What resonates with you during this second week of Lent?

Now, read the passage and notice how Isaiah has a vision of what the world can look like, starting with “Pay close attention now.” This is the purpose of Lent: to take the time to stop, reflect, spend time with God, pay close attention, and listen to what God is saying.”

Begin to ponder things of the past that you may not have let go of and given to God. Consider why you are holding on. Isaiah is letting us know that once we let go of the past and allow forgiveness to take place in our hearts, we will experience joy and see the new things God is creating.

Look at the list of Isaiah’s vision: no more weeping, anguish, no more premature death of babies, elders will live a long life, home ownership, planting of food that you can grow and eat, work satisfaction, blessed children and grandchildren, and God hearing and answering prayers. These are probably things we have not taken the time to reflect on, but now, during this Lenten season, you have the opportunity to reflect.

Respond

Now that you have seen Isaiah's list, what will you add for yourself for the vision you are seeking during this Lenten season? What is the joy you have been longing to experience?

Take another look at the photos and write your thoughts in comparison to what you wrote in the beginning of the reflection. What now resonates with you, and what do you believe God is speaking?

Rest

God, as we reflect today during this Lenten season, may we feel your presence and allow the peace of God to encamp around us. Continue to give us the strength to seek your face daily and to hear the still small voice of your Holy Spirit leading and guiding us. Bless us through this journey, and may we feel sheer joy in our lives. In Jesus Name, Amen

About the author



Rev. Dr. Cyntia P. Stewart is a minister at New Life Covenant Church Southeast in Chicago, IL. She has been leading a women's 5am prayer call each Wednesday since 2018. She works at Illinois Institute of Technology and is adjunct faculty at Loyola University Chicago. Her passion is to expose students to the diversity of Chicago neighborhoods, because experiential learning prepares them for life after college.

From Stone to Flesh: The Journey of Healing and Grace

A Reflection for Wednesday, March 4 by Rev. Coreenna Boucher Hoyt

Lectionary reading for 03/08/2023: [Psalm 128](#); [Ezekiel 36:22-32](#); [John 7:53-8:11](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Ezekiel 36:22-32

Read

Ezekiel 26:23-26,29-32 *NRSV* (emphasis added)

²³ I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them, and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ **A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.**

²⁹ I will save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. ³⁰ I will make the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field abundant, so that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. ³¹ Then you shall remember your evil ways and your dealings that were not good, and you shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominable deeds. ³² It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and dismayed for your ways, O house of Israel.

Reflect

It was 2 a.m. as I sat in silence with a distraught high school friend when she suddenly whispered, "I don't want God to give me a heart of flesh; my heart of stone keeps me safe." She had been abused and abandoned in unthinkable ways by those who were supposed to keep her safe. I had to affirm her feelings. She was right; her heart of stone protected her.

"But," I told her, "There is nothing left for a heart of stone but to shatter. A heart of flesh can heal." She began the slow road of healing. As I watched her transform into a generous, compassionate, thoughtful woman, she often struggled with feelings of unworthiness, even self-hatred. There were times she ran; literally running states away, to escape God's people who loved her because it was just too much to accept the kind of love she was being offered. She did not feel worthy. She remembered all the awful things she had done. She knew she had not earned this love, so she would run to people who treated her as poorly and undeserving as she felt.

The first time I read, “It’s not for your sake I will act,” in verse 32, I wanted to cross it out! I want God to act on my behalf. Yet as I walk with this high school friend, she needs these words from Ezekiel. They are words of relief. She feels ashamed and dismayed by herself and is unable to get her mind around what God has done for her. She needs to know that sometimes the blessing God is pouring onto her is not for her alone.

Yes, God has given all for you, more than you can imagine. Yes, God will restore you. Yes, God has great things for you. Yes, he has poured out grace upon grace, AND sometimes, what he does, it is not for you. It is a divine witness in the world; it is for the next person. When God's unfathomable grace is more than we can accept, verse 32 can help us create room, allowing God to transform our hurting, hard hearts. God has created space for us to receive gifts and grace that we have not earned and do not deserve before we believe ourselves worthy. He does it before we repent or change our behavior. Sometimes he pours out this grace for us; sometimes he pours it out despite us. Sometimes, like my high school friend, this is the only way we are ready to receive divine grace.

AND God invites us to reckon with our behavior. This passage tells Israel, “be ashamed and dismayed for your ways.” When we don’t run from the abundant grace of God and allow it to begin softening our hearts, we are invited to recognize our mistakes as well. I confess that my hard heart has allowed me to do unkind and selfish things, to be a part of the hurt or neglect of others. My sense of unworthiness had caused me to run from being known and loved, and also from loving and knowing.

God does not ask us to wallow in shame or self-hatred. Rather, when we recognize how our own hard-heartedness has impacted those around us, we can begin to participate in the healing and abundance of God, and our hearts will be softened, even unto ourselves.

Respond

- The Message version says, “What a mess you made of things.” Take some time to honestly examine the messes your communities and you, personally, have been a part of. What have you done and what have you left undone? How have your communities contributed to mess and hurt? Pour out the guilt and shame onto Jesus, who is both our sacrificial lamb and our scapegoat. He will remove your sins as far as the east is from the west.
- Imagine what peace, justice, and grace can look like for yourself, your family, and your community. Confess these desires and dreams to God. What abundance is he offering you?
- How is he calling you today to soften your heart toward yourself? A friend or family member? The community? How can you participate more fully in what God is restoring this week?

Rest

Lord God of Justice, Love and Mercy, gather all the scattered pieces of my heart and life. Clean me from all thoughts, actions, and feelings that would close or harden my heart. Free me from idols of self-doubt, shame, comparison, pride, and control. Save me and renew a right spirit within me. May the fruit of my life be gentleness, grace, mercy, humility, justice, and your power made perfect in my weakness. Show me today how to live courageously, using all you have given me to further your Kingdom righteousness and reconciliation. Lord, soften my heart, even toward myself, so I may fully experience the renovation you are doing in me.

About the Author



Corenna has a lifetime passion for ministries of reconciliation and healing. She enjoys speaking and preaching for various ministries. Corenna is an Evangelical Covenant Church pastor, sent as a missionary to Young Life in Rhode Island, where she lives with her two sons, who enjoy church, martial arts, music, and outdoor activities together. corenna.hoyt@gmail.com

Who has the Final Word?

A Reflection for Thursday, March 5 by Jillian Evans

Lectionary reading for 03/05/2026 [Psalm 95; Exodus 16:1-8; Colossians 1:15-23](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Colossians 1:15-23

Read

Colossians 1:15-23 *New International Version*

The Supremacy of the Son of God

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. **17** He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18** And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. **19** For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. **21** Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of [a] your evil behavior. **22** But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— **23** if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Reflect

In a time when our country feels like a house divided against itself, **Colossians 1:15–23** offers a grounding truth that cuts through the noise of the news cycle. We are currently surrounded by "thrones, powers, rulers, and authorities"—forces that Paul specifically mentions in verse 16. In our modern context, these are the political machines, the polarized media, and the ideologies that demand we choose a side and treat the "other" as an enemy.

The fracture in our society is deep, and the tension is high. It often feels like the very fabric of our communities is tearing at the seams. Yet, Paul presents a reality that overrules our current chaos: **"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."**

This isn't an abstract idea; it is a practical anchor. When the headlines suggest that everything is unraveling, this passage reminds us there is a power more ancient and more certain than any government or movement. Christ is the "firstborn over all creation," meaning He has the final word over the mess we find ourselves in. While we are busy trying to fix things through rhetoric or policy, Paul points us to the One who sustains our very breath and existence.

The most striking part of this passage is the move toward reconciliation. In a culture that thrives on being "alienated" and "hostile in mind," Christ's work is the exact opposite. He "made peace through his blood, shed on the cross" to bring together what was broken.

If Christ is the one holding the world together, we don't have to carry the weight of the country on my shoulders.

We can breathe. Our hope doesn't have to rise and fall with the latest poll or protest. Instead, we can stand on the firm faith mentioned in verse 23, trusting that even in a fractured nation, the King of kings is still on His throne, and He is not letting go.

Respond

- **Release the Weight:** Identify one political anxiety that keeps you stressed.. Mentally hand it over to the Lord, repeating the phrase, "*You are before this, and You hold this together.*"
- **Curate Your Intake:** For one day, replace the time you spend reading political commentary with time spent in the Gospels. Intentionally shift your focus from the "rulers and authorities" of the earth back to the One who is "the head of the body."

Rest

Lord, You are the head of all things, and nothing is outside of Your reach. When our country feels like it is falling apart, thank You for holding us together. Calm my heart, steady my mind, and help me to be a person of peace in a divided world. Amen.



About the Author

Jillian, a graduate of North Park Seminary, is a spiritual director in Chicago. She and her husband have three amazing adult children and are enjoying this phase of life while traveling the world.

Breaking Down Dividing Walls: Embracing Unity in Christ

A Reflection for Friday, March 6 by Cindy Riley

Lectionary reading for 03/6/2023: [Psalm 95](#); [Exodus 16:9-21](#); [Ephesians 2:11-22](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Ephesians 2:11-22

Read

Ephesians 2:11-22, *New Living Translation*

¹¹ Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. ¹² In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. ¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Reflection

Paul begins today's passage with the imperative "Don't forget," or, put another way, remember where you used to be and who you are now. In this time of polarized thinking, we all find ourselves on one side or another of various issues. The systems of the world create points of division across lines of race, gender, sexuality, economic status, and the list goes on. This polarized thinking has created barriers within communities, families, relationships, and—yes—the church.

Paul refers to the dividing wall in the temple courts that served as a barricade to keep Gentiles from getting any closer to the Holy of Holies, where God's presence resided. The Gentiles who sought to worship God and be part of His people were relegated to the outside, looking in, because of this wall.

I wonder what dividing walls we have erected that keep those who are seeking God on the outside, looking in. Where are we, as the body of Christ, building walls between ourselves that keep others from wanting to be part of this "new" way of life Jesus ushered in? \\\

We are often blind to these walls because we believe we have erected them in defense of the gospel or to protect the faith. But the gospel does not need defending. The gospel is Good News. And yet, I fear we have turned it into bad news through our own walls of hostility.

Take some time to ask God where you might be more committed to an issue, a conviction, or a particular way of understanding—and therefore building walls. Maybe you have a difference of opinion with someone, so you avoid eye contact for fear of where the conversation might go. Perhaps you avoid connecting with certain family members because they take the opposite side on an issue. Or maybe you avoid interacting with a certain person or group of people because you don't understand how they can be the way they are, or why they don't see Scripture and God's ways the same as you do. These are all building blocks for walls of hostility.

Jesus tore down these walls through his death, burial, and resurrection.

Respond

This Lenten season, allow God to disrupt your comfortable spaces and reveal where you have built walls. What bricks of gender, race, class, or difference of understanding have you used?

Let go of the security these bricks provide and humbly:

- Repent of your part in building walls;
- Receive God's forgiveness;
- Risk reaching across differences and spending time with those not so like you;
- Restore unity, one step at a time, with the help of the Holy Spirit;
- Remember who you are and whose you are as we sojourn together.

And be patient and kind with yourself. These walls were not built in a day.

Rest

Holy Spirit,

I trust in your healing work that tears down the walls of hostility in our lives.

*Please give me eyes to see what you see as barriers to the Good News,
and fill me with courage to make a change.*

Amen



About the Author

Cindy lives in Swannanoa, NC, with her husband, Dennis. Following Hurricane Helene, she launched Essence Centered Care & Leadership, offering spiritual care, staff well-being, and leadership support to organizations serving the community. She and Dennis share four daughters and six grandchildren. Cindy enjoys hiking North Carolina trails, traveling, reading, writing, crocheting, and a good cup of tea.

Finding Rest in the Wilderness

A Reflection for Saturday, March 7 By Sally Carlson

Lectionary reading for 03/7/2026: [Psalm 95: Exodus 16:27-35: John 4:1-6](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Exodus 16:27-35

Read

Exodus 16:27-35 *New International Version*

27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. **28** Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you[a] refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? **29** Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” **30** So the people rested on the seventh day.

31 The people of Israel called the bread manna.[b] It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. **32** Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.’”

33 So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come.”

34 As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law, so that it might be preserved. **35** The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

Reflect

Are you tired? I'm tired. I come to this reflection - and this Lenten season - feeling much like Bilbo Baggins in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. “I feel thin, sort of stretched... Like butter spread over too much bread.” I'm not feeling stretched because of some fantastical ring, but because of the product of my own choices - what I say 'yes' to and what I say 'no' to. I say 'yes' to too many things, and then I live with the consequences later. It is so easy to get caught up in all the activity of the day and not create space and margin for the Spirit to work in and through me. The desire to say 'yes' all the time and fill my days is really a desire for control, to be needed and important, and to do it all by myself.

We are always trying to do things ourselves. Trusting in others and God to care for us in ways that we can't care for ourselves is a challenge. How can we be sure that what we need (or what we think we need!) will be provided? It's so hard for me! Just as I have disappointed others, others have done the same to me - we're human! And certainly God has provided - just not

always in the ways that I wanted or thought that I was promised. I am in a deep season of grief over some of the things that I trusted God to provide (because I ~~needed~~ wanted them!), and I'm disappointed. Like the people of Israel, I am grumbling! In the verses preceding this passage, they complained that life had been better in Egypt. The words, 'if only...' were on their minds and hearts. Now they are wandering in the wilderness, feel abandoned, and so God provides for their needs by promising manna and quail. They were told to gather only what they needed. Those who gathered too much and those who gathered too little all received just what they needed. Any extra got all full of maggots. Gross. With this literal gift raining down from heaven, they were reminded to gather extra so that they could rest on the Sabbath. Even with these explicit instructions, they still didn't get it, and some went out on the Sabbath morning and found nothing. Verse 28 says, "The Lord says to Moses, 'How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? *Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath...*'"

God provided the people of Israel with the Sabbath as an opposite way of life to the one they had lived in Egypt. There they lived to work - they were forced to. In Egypt, there was no rest, and their food came at the whim of the empire. In the wilderness, they had to trust God in a whole new way and adjust to a new rhythm of dependence. In this season, I am finding it hard to turn from the constant busyness and work in an attempt to feel in control - even as I sometimes feel I am stumbling around in the wilderness. In the midst of grief and doubt, I find myself saying both 'if only' about my current situation and also trying to store up the manna God is sending me rather than engaging in Sabbath rest and connection. What does it look like to gather God's provision for today and not try to control tomorrow? How do we slow down to listen to the Spirit and see God at work in the moment, even in the midst of the wilderness? Lent is an opportunity to pause in the remote wilderness and allow God's provision to rain down upon us and give us what we need - particularly when we are stretched thin.

Respond

We grumble when we get caught up in the past (which we can't change) and the future (which we can't control). Take a moment to be still and take in where you are today - in this moment. What do you need to hear from God today? What sorts of provision do you need from Him today? Do you need rest? Fellowship? A conversation? Watch for the ways God provides for you today.

Rest

Gracious God, may we be able to recognize you at work in the everyday. So often we are caught up in the moment, in the grief, in the busy, and we can miss what you are doing. Open our eyes to the movement of your Spirit in our lives and in our world. Help us to find both purpose and rest in You, who gives us all that we need. Amen

About the Author



Sally Carlson serves as associate pastor at Shoreline Covenant Church in Shoreline, WA. She loves reading, the outdoors, hotdish (she's from MN!), and a good cup of coffee! Sally especially loves walking with people as they walk with Jesus. Sally lives in Shoreline, WA, with her husband, Daniel.

Drawing from the Well of our Ancestors

A Reflection for the Third Sunday of Lent by Rev. Anna Traynham

Lectionary reading for 03/8/2026: [Exodus 17:1-7](#), [Psalm 95](#), [Romans 5:1-11](#), [John 4:5-42](#)

Selected passage for reflection: John 4:5-30

Read

5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?"

8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.[a])

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

17 "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

25 The woman said, "I know that the Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

27 Just then, his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Reflect

It’s interesting to imagine Jesus sitting by the well that day, thirsty and without a bucket to draw water. He may have been waiting for a kind stranger to come along, confronting the very real feeling of thirst. When you’re parched, it’s hard to think straight; your mouth feels dry, making it difficult to speak. This aspect of the story is significant: Jesus was thirsty.

While we often contemplate Jesus’s divinity—being God incarnate—it’s important to remember that he had a physical body. Jesus was a real person, and people get thirsty. After traveling for days, he sat alone by a well and asked a Samaritan woman for compassion, leading to a mutual exchange of kindness in a context many wouldn’t expect.

This encounter was surprising for several reasons. First, Jesus was a Jewish man speaking with a Samaritan woman. The division between Jews and Samaritans runs deep, originating in ancient disputes over worship, but over generations, it solidified into prejudice. “They are not like us,” they said—words that have always led to division.

Jesus, at Jacob’s well, conversed with a Samaritan woman, despite their stark differences. There’s no evidence to suggest that this woman was sinful or shameful, as some sermons imply. Instead, her history of five husbands likely reflects a tragic story of widowhood or divorce, possibly due to societal pressures. She might have been ostracized by her community, which is why she was alone at the well in the midday heat. Yet, despite their differences, both Jesus and the Samaritan woman shared a profound truth: they were human, and that connection was enough.

The world today feels heavy. Violence—including that perpetrated by our own government—against immigrants and citizens is alarming. Yet, amid the chaos, there are peaceful protests and a resilient spirit that endures. As a pastor, I hear the fears of immigrants and citizens alike—many seek lawful immigration reform yet wish to avoid the turmoil surrounding it. People are scared, hurting, and angry.

They are thirsty; perhaps even we are. When Jesus found himself thirsty, he approached the ancestral well and met a Samaritan woman. Their shared humanity was sufficient for a meaningful connection.

Now is the time for us to draw from that well. Let us embrace the wisdom of prophets like Amos and Micah, who spoke against injustice, as well as the apostles who proclaimed their faith despite danger. We can draw courage from figures like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemoller, who opposed racism with conviction, and find peace in the legacies of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Desmond Tutu, whose nonviolent resistance brought about change.

Just as the brave Samaritan woman first proclaimed Jesus as Messiah, our witness can effect change. Jesus met her at the well—two individuals connected by their shared humanity. This connection matters to God. The world needs the church's hope and our voices more than ever. If we're feeling thirsty, let's return to the ancestors' well, where we can find kindred spirits and renewed purpose. May we lift His living water to our lips and share it with the world.

Respond

Are you thirsty? What well of wisdom can you draw from today? Consider one of the theologians and peacemakers listed above (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemoller, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu, or another brave change-maker). Consider reading a book or watching a documentary on their life to inspire you.

Rest

God, today we recognize our shared humanity. We are hurting, fearful, and vulnerable. Help us connect with one another and with our ancestors. May we find hope and inspiration in scripture and in the justice workers and truth-tellers from history. And may we embody that Good News and share it with our community. Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Anna George Traynham serves as Senior Pastor of Shallowford Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Sound of Awakening

A Reflection for Monday, March 9 by Rev. Dr. Rose Lee-Norman

Lectionary reading for 3/9/26: [Psalm 81](#); [Genesis 24:1-27](#); [2 John 1:1-13](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 81

Read

Psalm 81 (NIV)

Sing for joy to God our strength;
shout aloud to the God of Jacob!
Begin the music, strike the timbrel,
play the melodious harp and lyre.
Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon,
and when the moon is full, on the day of
our festival;
this is a decree for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
When God went out against Egypt,
he established it as a statute for Joseph.
I heard an unknown voice say:
"I removed the burden from their shoulders;
their hands were set free from the basket.
In your distress you called and I rescued
you,
I answered you out of a thundercloud;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.
Hear me, my people, and I will warn you—
if you would only listen to me, Israel!
You shall have no foreign god among you;

you shall not worship any god other than
me.
I am the Lord your God,
who brought you up out of Egypt.
Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.
"But my people would not listen to me;
Israel would not submit to me.
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
to follow their own devices.
"If my people would only listen to me,
if Israel would only follow my ways,
how quickly I would subdue their enemies
and turn my hand against their foes!
Those who hate the Lord would cringe
before him,
and their punishment would last forever.
But you would be fed with the finest of
wheat;
with honey from the rock I would satisfy
you."

Reflect

I've grown to see Lent as an awakening.

Not the gentle stirring kind, but the kind that calls you out of sleep. It is a season when we allow God to shake us out of numbness. It's an invitation to be honest about injustice, suffering, and the places where fear and control shape us more than love does. Lent is an invitation to listen again to God's beckoning voice.

Psalm 81 is an invitation to awakening. It begins in joyful song – a melodious harp, the sounding of a ram's horn, and full-fledged celebration – remembering the God who lifts burdens and sets

people free. But then the tone shifts. God laments in verse 8, “If only my people would listen to me.” The grief in the psalm is not anger alone; it is heartbreak. A longing for people to awaken to a better way, to trust the voice that leads to life instead of the instincts that lead to harm.

I live and pastor in Minneapolis, MN. And living in Minneapolis during Operation Metro Surge, I saw immense fear move through communities already carrying deep wounds. Families braced for separation. Neighbors wondered who might disappear next. Heartbreak seemed to reverberate through our community, the state, and across our country over humans being reduced to their immigration status, met by a cruel and hardened system of oppression.

But as the country and world saw, Minnesotans didn’t retreat or stay silent. There were many ways people stepped up, seeking to be good neighbors during such a tumultuous time. The extensions of love were vast and exceptionally creative. We likely all heard reports of people delivering groceries, giving rides to work and school, and keeping alert outside schools and daycares. I also know people who shared their airline miles to help people released from detention centers in Texas fly back home. I know some who drove down to Texas, not knowing anyone who was detained, but offering free rides back to Minnesota. There were marches and prayer vigils, neighborhood watch groups, and whistles distributed block by block.

I was especially moved when a group called Singing Resistance began forming marches of peaceful protesters singing songs of dissent. After church one Sunday afternoon, I decided to join them. We met in a large church and learned a few songs together. The place was packed, with hundreds who couldn’t even make it inside the church’s sanctuary. We were around 2,000 in number, and our objective was to encourage ICE agents to defect; to put down their weapons, choose humanity, and stop the cycle of harm.

Marching to hotels in downtown Minneapolis where ICE agents were staying, we sang, “It’s okay to change your mind. Show us your courage, leave this behind. And you can join us, join us anytime.” Then one song that caused tears to well up, “We walk the same road, but we’ve been torn apart. Put down your weapons, come sing your part.” As we sang these choruses in rounds, it provided a form of ventilation of hope into a season of suffocation.

Our songs were not naïve. They were an offering. We sang because we believed awakening is possible. For individuals, communities, and systems broken by sin in our world.

Psalms 81 reminds us that God desires to free all of us. A desire to liberate the oppressed from the suffering of the unjust - and the powerful from the lie that domination brings security. Lent awakens us to this deeper truth that we are more than just individuals with a personal faith, but we are a collective people called to emulate the way of Jesus, whether that’s deep concern for our neighbor (chosen or not), risky love of our enemy, or audacious hope that all broken things can be made right.

Singing in the cold streets of downtown Minneapolis, I heard in my own voice the fervent hope of the psalm: If only we would listen. If only we would turn. If only we would awaken to the God who longs to feed us “honey from the rock,” instead of the bitterness of endless cycles of harm. May we all be awakened this Lent.

For more information on Singing Resistance Twin Cities, [see this article](#).

Respond

What needs to be awakened in your life?

Where has your hope dimmed amidst the pain and suffering in this world?

How is God inviting you to draw closer to Him and, in doing so, soften you toward your neighbor?

When fear, complacency, or cynicism seek to rob you of hope, how can you return to the promise of God's love and restoration?

Rest

*God who calls your people to listen,
Awaken us.*

Awaken us to your hope, love, compassion, and justice.

Awaken us to one another.

Free us from fear and the habits of harm.

Teach us to long for honey from the rock instead of the bitterness of exclusion and suspicion of one another.

May our lives become invitations to peace, repentance, courage, and restoration.

Amen

About the Author



Rev. Dr. Rose Lee-Norman serves as Executive Pastor at Sanctuary Covenant Church in North Minneapolis, MN. She received her Doctor of Ministry from Boston University's School of Theology and is ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church. She teaches as adjunct faculty at Bethel University in St. Paul, MN and North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL. She is married to Ryan and they have two daughters.

Listening in a New Way

A Reflection for Tuesday, March 10 by Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Lobello Edwards

Lectionary reading for 03/10/2026: [Psalm 81: Genesis 29:1-14: 1 Corinthians 10:1-4](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 81:1-7

Read

Psalm 81: 1-7 *The Message*

1-5 A song to our strong God!
a shout to the God of Jacob!
Anthems from the choir, music from the band,
sweet sounds from lute and harp,
Trumpets and trombones and horns:
it's festival day, a feast to God!
A day decreed by God,
solemnly ordered by the God of Jacob.
He commanded Joseph to keep this day
so we'd never forget what he did in Egypt.

I hear this most gentle whisper from One
I never guessed would speak to me:

6-7
"I took the world off your shoulders,
freed you from a life of hard labor.
You called to me in your pain;
I got you out of a bad place.
I answered you from where the thunder hides,
I proved you at Meribah Fountain.

Reflect

"I hear this most gentle whisper from One I never guessed would speak to me..."

Have you ever learned something that allowed you to listen in a new way?

My daughter is in speech therapy, and through her evaluations and conversations with the therapists working with her, I have learned so much about the physical movements you must make with your mouth to produce specific sounds. For example, in order to help my daughter learn to make "blended" sounds - "st" (stop), "sl" (slow), etc. - we've had to take each word and break it down letter by letter to listen carefully to where the "s" sound stops and the rest of the word blends and continues. Once we identify where the word blends together, we work on making our mouths make the correct sounds. We've played many games sticking out our tongues and touching our tongues to the tops of our mouths and back of our teeth to make certain sounds - and while the end goal is speaking clearly, we can't get there without careful listening first. Careful listening that leads to action.

Today, our scripture calls the worshiping community to celebration and then offers a pause as a reminder from God (a voice not expected and in other Biblical translations, not known) pulls the community to remember the mighty acts of God's salvation: answering their cries, rescuing them from bondage, and leading them safely through the wilderness. Listening to this voice redirects their worship from a regular liturgical celebration to a response to God's gracious acts toward Israel in the past. The scripture continues to show that the worshiping community forgets these acts of God and does not listen, yet God still calls. God's voice continues to ring out in the wilderness. And listening to God's voice leads to action.

I wonder how you best listen to God speak in your life? Watching my daughter patiently work on parsing words and sounds together, I am reminded that active listening can lead to major transformation, but that transformation takes time and requires work and perseverance.

Where is God speaking in your life?

How can you actively listen in ways that lead to transformation in your life and in your community?

Respond

Today, you are invited to give space to actively listen for God's transforming word through prayer. Pick a short verse of scripture that is familiar or challenging and offer it as a prayer by repeating the verse and leaving off the final word until you are left with only one word. After each time you repeat this scripture, leave space and silence to listen.

Here is an example of this practice using Psalm 46:10. Feel free to use this as your prayer today.

Psalm 46:10a: "Be still and know that I am God."

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I

Be still and know that

Be still and know

Be still and

Be still

Be

Rest

Holy and Merciful God,

In your grace, you call to us each day. Forgive us when we do not take the time to slow down and listen. Open our ears and our hearts that we may hear your voice and allow our lives to be transformed as we remember your mighty deeds and live our days in the promise of your love. Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Lobello Edwards is an elder in the United Methodist Church, currently on family leave. Elizabeth received her MDiv and DMin from Candler School of Theology and resides in Atlanta with her children (Willow and Thomas), Great Dane (Pepper), and husband (Adam). She enjoys hosting nerdy board game nights and exploring new restaurants around the city.

Dry, Cracked Cisterns Hold No Water

A Reflection for Wednesday, March 11 by Rev Alicia Vela Anderson

Lectionary reading for 03/11/2026: [Psalm 81](#); [Jeremiah 2:4-13](#); [John 7:14-31, 37-39](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Jeremiah 2:9-13

Read

Jeremiah 2: 9-13 NRSVUE

Therefore once more I accuse you,
says the Lord,
and I accuse your children's children.
Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look;
send to Kedar and examine with care;
see if there has ever been such a thing.
Has a nation changed its gods,
even though they are no gods?
But my people have changed their glory
for something that does not profit.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this;
be shocked; be utterly desolate,
says the Lord,
for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living water,
and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns
that can hold no water.

Reflect

At the beginning of Lent, in search of something to fast from, I asked myself the question, "What's something that is no longer serving me?" It was a softer way of urging me to take a harsh look at my patterns and what I was filling my time and space with. Rather than try to shame myself out of certain behaviors or reliances, I wanted to use this season to take a deeper look into the places in my life where I was digging out my own cistern rather than drinking from the Living Water offered to me.

Lent is often seen as a time of creating rhythm or practice in our lives, but it can also be a good time to disrupt the pattern. We all have the ability or tendency to keep something around because it's easy or comfortable. The thing we do because it's routine, it could even be a helpful habit, or neutral. We couldn't dream of not doing that thing.

But in reality, it's something that's become less of a choice and more of an automatic. Every time I open my phone, my fingers naturally go to this app, even if I opened it for something else. My morning doesn't start until I've had my morning cup of coffee. We can get to the point where our lives are just moving from one pattern to the next. One task to another without even thinking about it.

It's not until we have an interruption that we even really think about what that action was doing for or to us. I uncovered one of these patterns when I found myself coming home from work, sitting on the couch, and completely dissociating with my phone. Suddenly, it was an hour later,

and I had no idea where the time had gone. I would tell myself I deserved the time because of everything that had transpired that day. I needed the “rest” of checking out.

And yes, once in a while, we need to check out. But every day for months on end? Probably not. Because when I was actually honest with myself, checking out was actually my way of not dealing with the toxicity of my workplace. It was keeping me from telling the truth that I was drowning, and something needed to change.

The prophet Jeremiah says there were two ways the people were falling short: not only were they not going to the God of Living Water, but they were also digging their own cisterns to quench their thirst, ones that wouldn't even hold water. It's one thing to refuse to take your thirst and hunger to God; it's another to try to find the sustenance elsewhere.

Because honestly, nothing is going to give you that deep, satisfying fullness like the love and beauty of the Creator. Nothing will fill your cup in the same way. I've seen the evidence in my own life: putting down the habit that was providing me with the “rest” of checking out and picking up the habits of rest that draw me closer to the heart of God gave me the confidence to find better for myself.

Respond

My guess is that the Spirit is already bringing up something for you to examine after reading these words. Take a moment to quiet your mind and body and connect yourself to the heart of God, inviting you in. Ask the Spirit to show you where you've dug your own cistern rather than drawing up the living water.

Rest

Creator God, I know you by your Spirit, remind me that I am your beloved child. Guide me back toward your arms, where I find belonging and unwavering grace. Amen



About the Author

Rev. Alicia Vela Anderson serves as a Spiritual Formation Coach at a nonprofit that builds on the strengths, skills, and potential of young moms. She is passionate about guiding others through discovering the beauty of God in their own stories and journeys. She lives in Chicago, IL, with her husband, where she enjoys exploring, reading, and living locally.

Sisters Before Mistery

A Reflection for Thursday, March 12 by Leana Lopez

Lectionary reading for 03/12/2026: [Psalm 23](#); [1 Samuel 15:10-21](#); [Ephesians 4:25-32](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Ephesians 4:25-32

Read

Ephesians 4:25-32 (NIV)

Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Reflect

There's a kind of anger that doesn't announce itself. It doesn't raise its voice or slam doors. It shows up quietly — in the way you answer someone's question with a little less warmth than usual, in the way you "forget" to return a call, in the way you smile while saying something that was never quite meant as a kindness. That's the anger this passage has been speaking to me about lately. Not the big, dramatic kind — the kind we can easily name — but the anger that lives in the margins of our daily interactions, the kind we rarely admit to ourselves that it is even there.

In college, I lived with my best friend, and we did everything together until one day when she showed up with a boy. And just like that, I was no longer the priority. It's an age-old story that I'm sure many can relate to. You have this friend, and you swear allegiance to them. They become your ride or die. You proclaim "Sisters before misters!" until one of you goes and gets a boyfriend. She just simply wasn't around. And when she was, I felt unseen, dismissed, like my needs simply didn't register on her radar.

I never said anything directly. I told myself I was happy for her. And when she was around, I was just tired. Just busy. Just being realistic about who they were and what they could do. But if I'm honest, I had quietly made a decision about them. I started responding to their texts a little slower. I stopped sharing the things that actually mattered to me. When they asked how I was doing, I said "fine" — and meant it as a wall, not an answer. I was still physically showing up. I was still being kind in all the technical ways. But I had emotionally checked out, and I was using

my composed exterior as a kind of punishment I didn't have to own. I wasn't yelling — I was disappearing. Then one day, my friend left a note on my pillow with the lyrics of “Be Here Now” by Mason Jennings. The lyrics were asking me to come back, to be present and real with her. That slow, deliberate withdrawal from my friend was its own kind of falsehood. Paul's words cut right through me: *put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor*. I had been lying — not with my words, but with my lack of presence.

In my work as a therapist and grief counselor, I see this pattern constantly. So much of what brings people to my office isn't grief they can name easily — it's anger they've never once called anger. It's the mother who says she's "just exhausted" but hasn't let anyone be truly close to her in years. It's the adult child who insists they're "over" the parent who left, but can't sustain any relationship without eventually sabotaging it. Grief and anger can sometimes share the same house. And when we refuse to name the anger, it doesn't leave — it just changes clothes. It becomes distance, sarcasm, perfectionism, or that particular coldness that masquerades as strength.

Paul doesn't tell us not to feel anger. He says, *"In your anger, do not sin."* The feeling isn't the problem. The hiding is. The festering is. The letting it quietly rot into bitterness while we tell everyone — and ourselves — that everything is fine. That's the foothold the enemy gets: not in the honest moment of anger, but in the long, unexamined silence that follows it. The path toward being people who build others up begins with the courage to tell the truth about what is happening inside us.

The Lyrics to Be Here Now, by Mason Jennings

*“Be here now, no other place to be
Or just sit there dreaming of how life would be
If we were somewhere better
Somewhere far away from all all worries
Well, here we are, You are the love of my life*

*Be here now, no other place to be
All the doubts that linger, just set them free
And let good things happen
And let the future come into each moment
Like a rising sun
You are the love of my life, You are the love of
my life, Yeah, you know you are
Sun comes up and we start again, Sun comes
up and we start again
And it's all new today*

*All we have to say
Is be here now
Be here now, no other place to be
This whole world keeps changing, come change
with me
Everything that's happened, all that's yet to
come
Is here inside this moment, it's the only one
You are the love of my life, You are the love of
my life, Yeah, you know you are
Sun comes up and we start again, Sun comes
up and we start again
It's all new today
All we have to say
Is be here now”*

Respond

Take a moment today to sit honestly with yourself and ask: *Is there an anger I have been unwilling to name?* You don't have to resolve it— you just have to be willing to call it what it is.

Rest

Lord God, you know what lives beneath the surface of us — every hurt we've quietly swallowed, every bitterness we've dressed up as something else. Give us the courage to be honest with you, with ourselves, and with one another. Teach us to speak truth in love, to let go before the sun goes down, and to receive the same grace we are called to extend. Amen

About the Author



As a nonprofit and healthcare leader, I've dedicated my career to transforming behavioral health systems and expanding access to quality care. My work centers on designing compassionate, innovative solutions that better serve vulnerable populations and drive meaningful change across clinical and community settings.

As the Owner & CEO of [Flex Therapy](#), I focus on developing and consulting on collaborative, data-driven models that improve outcomes for high-risk communities. I work closely with stakeholders to build culturally responsive approaches that strengthen care delivery.

I'm also passionate about the power of creativity—through art, writing, and innovative problem-solving—to inspire growth, enhance well-being, and spark meaningful transformation.

The Lord is my Shepherd

A Reflection for Friday, March 13 by Rev. Dawn Holt Lauber

Lectionary reading for 3/13/2026: [Psalm 23](#); [1 Samuel 15:10-21](#); [Ephesians 4:25-32](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 23

Read

Psalm 23 *King James Version*

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

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.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Reflect

Throughout the scriptures, the Lord is described as the Shepherd who provides for and protects His sheep. Sometimes “His sheep” refers to the people of Israel, and at other times we see ourselves as “His sheep.” In Isaiah 40:11, the Lord tends to His flock - the children of Israel. He gathers His lambs in his arms and draws them close to his heart. In John 10, Jesus speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep, declaring: “*I know My sheep, and My sheep know Me.*” In 1st Peter, Jesus is described as the Chief Shepherd, the guardian of our very souls, who gives to all those who believe in Him the crown of glory that never fades away.

At the center of this psalm is our deep need for a Savior, a Shepherd, a Messiah: The Lord is my Shepherd. We are one of the sheep resting in the protection of God, who is our Shepherd. Faith in the Good Shepherd takes away any desire for something other than God; it is the end of want and dissatisfaction. Because all of our needs are supplied by the LORD, we proclaim: “I shall not want.”

God provides the rest and assurance we need. The Shepherd knows when we should rest and where we should rest. We are not left alone in our choices. We lean on the wisdom of the Lord. The Lord makes us rest in places that are safe and fertile – places of true refuge for our weary

souls. Trusting in the Good Shepherd leads us to green, plentiful, abundant spaces and calm, comforting places that refresh us.

On our own, sheep stray from green pastures and do not know where still waters are. “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.*” We do not need to do this life alone. We have a loving Savior who guides and sustains us. For the glory of the Shepherd’s own name, He leads us in the right paths. The closer we follow the Lord and trust in His good word, the calmer and more confident we become in our concerns and questions.

God leads us to the abundance of green pastures and the safety of still waters, and through uncertain pathways. Life has peaks and valleys and every kind of height and depth in between. We cannot navigate any of these paths without God. Even in the darkest valley, we have nothing to fear because God is with us. We are not alone. The presence of the Shepherd casts out all fear of evil – not the presence of evil, but our fear of it. Evil is still present in this world, but we can withstand it because God goes before us. We do not face evil alone. “*The Lord is for me; I do not fear.*”

From the valley, we turn to the Lord’s rich and abundant table. Even in the presence of our enemies, we trust that the Lord has not abandoned us. God anoints us with oil and fills us until we overflow with His mercy. Despite the deadly valley we have traversed, and in the presence of our enemies, we enjoy the goodness of the Shepherd’s provision at the table.

The psalm ends with a prayer of thanksgiving: grateful that God’s goodness and steadfast love pursue us all of our earthly days and all our days in heaven.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is the one who restores our souls, leads us in the paths of righteousness, accompanies us through danger, spreads the holy supper before us in the presence of sin and death, and pursues us in His gracious love all the days of our lives.

Respond

Are you in a place of want? Do you wonder where God is in the day-to-day, or in the midst of a troubling time? Are you seeking abundance from the Lord? Do you need to be filled by the Holy Spirit? Or perhaps you need the calm, comfort, and security of stillness – away from chaotic waters? Ask God to help you find some space and silence often in the days leading up to Holy Week to give these needs over to the Lord.

Rest

Be our Shepherd, O Lord, and bless us with all good things that we may be refreshed with your overflowing cup and dwell in your house forever; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

About the Author



Dawn Holt Lauber is a pastor, poet, singer, and songwriter. Her original sacred jazz, as well as jazz arrangements of favorite hymns, can be found at www.dawnholtlauber.com. Dawn is an ordained minister with the Evangelical Covenant Church and serves as Associate Pastor of Congregational Life at Glen Ellyn Covenant Church in Illinois.

Reflecting the Light

A Reflection for Saturday, March 14 by Ruth Zschoche

Lectionary reading for 03/14/2026: [Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:32-34; John 1:1-9](#);

Selected passage for reflection: John 1:1-9

Read

John 1:1-9 *New Living Translation*

In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,

and the Word was God.

² He existed in the beginning with God.

³ God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.

⁴ The Word gave life to everything that was created,^[a]
and his life brought light to everyone.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.^[b]

⁶ God sent a man, John the Baptist,^[c] ⁷ to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. ⁸ John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. ⁹ The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

Reflect

I have been reflecting on this passage recently. In John 1, I read about the Word. This Word existed in the beginning. This Word was with God. This Word was God. Who is this Word who was from the beginning and through whom all was created? It is Jesus, the Son of God. Nothing was created except through Him! This Word is named the Light!

The Scripture goes on to tell me about John the Baptist, who himself was not the Light but came to tell everyone about the Light.

My husband retired recently, and now we are traveling a lot! In fact, I am writing this from a ship in the middle of the Tasman Ocean near Tauranga, New Zealand. As I have thought about travel and how it is impacting my “ministry”, I have at times felt that being gone would mean I wasn’t able to continue in ministry. But that is a very faulty and narrow conception of ministry. I am reminded that I am not the light. I am a reflection of the Light! John 1:8 says that John himself wasn’t the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light.

When I began to shift my perspective about ministry from a job to being called to reflect the light, I started seeing the people around me as part of my calling to ministry. I have had so many

special conversations with people from around the world, people I would never have met and spoken with if I had stayed home thinking I needed to “do” ministry in that single space. The world is open to me. I am reflecting the Light to many people who work quietly in the background, who are often unseen and unknown.

John spoke loudly, shouting to the crowds. I am not shouting; I am just daily praying that I am reflecting the light to those around me.

Respond

Recently, in a Lectio 365 morning devotion, I was challenged by the following question and prayer. “With every person I meet, would you show me something you particularly value in them? Give me an opportunity to encourage them, serve them, or promote their interests.”

How about you? How are you a reflection of the Light in your daily life, regardless of where you are or what you are doing? How might you use this question and prayer as you go about your day? At the end of the day, as you reflect on your day, possibly with an examen, write down the person/s to whom you reflected the Light. Then keep them in your prayers through the coming days and weeks.

Rest

Lord, today, please help me be a reflection of your light. Open my eyes to see those who may be missed by others. Draw me into conversation, so I may reflect your love and care. May Your Light in me be an opportunity to encourage, serve, or just give an extra touch of love.

About the Author



Ruth loves her calling as a Spiritual Director. She delights in holding space and walking alongside those who are listening for God’s movement in their lives. She is mom to one son, a daughter-in-love, and Omi to two beautiful granddaughters. She loves to travel with her husband, who recently retired. She enjoys hiking, biking, swimming, reading, playing the piano, and praising God wherever she is in the world, but loves living in the beautiful Colorado mountains.

He Makes Me Lie Down

A Reflection for the fourth Sunday of Lent by Rev. Jessie Lowry

Lectionary reading for 03/15/2026: [1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 23

Read

Psalm 23 NRSV

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

Reflect

We've all heard Psalm 23 many times over the course of our lives. We've seen it stitched into needlepoint, heard it read at funerals, and even encountered it woven into popular music and culture. As one writer puts it, Psalm 23 has become something of a "secular icon." It belongs not only to the religious but to the human imagination. And that raises a question: why this psalm? Why does this ancient image of God as a shepherd continue to comfort people in a post-modern world?

To understand Psalm 23, it helps to notice what comes just before it. Psalm 22 is a raw lament—full of anguish, fear, and abandonment. "All my foes surround me... my heart has turned to wax... my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Psalm 23 follows that. Which makes it all the more remarkable. The psalmist has been through hell—and still dares to trust God to guide.

A shepherd guides in two ways. One is with the staff—used to pull sheep from danger or gently redirect them when they stray. The other is with the shepherd's voice. Sheep may not be brilliant, but they know the sound of the one who loves them. Lent invites us to listen again for that voice amid the noise and urgency of our lives.

Try this simple exercise: name the things for which you are most grateful. Then name the things you most want right now. Ask yourself: Which would change my life more—losing what I'm grateful for, or gaining what I want?

The psalm speaks of green pastures and quiet waters because our souls need restoration. We were made to lie down—but we resist it. Our world moves at one speed, too fast, and we often work against the very rest we crave. Sheep only lie down when they feel safe. That, too, is the shepherd’s work.

Even in the valley—especially there—God draws near. Even at the table, where our enemies linger, grace is poured out until the cup overflows. Perhaps our greatest enemy is within: fear, pride, apathy, the impulse to run when we are most lost. Yet goodness and mercy pursue us. We cannot outrun God’s love. Lent invites us to stop running, to receive what is already being offered, and to rest—at last—in the care of the Shepherd.

Respond

- In what areas of your life are you most tempted to run from God’s guidance or grace?
- How might you listen more closely for the Shepherd’s voice amid the noise and busyness of life?
- Which “needs” in your life are deepest—the things you want, or the things that restore your soul?
- Where have you experienced God’s care even in your “valleys of the shadow of death”?
- How can you practice resting in God’s presence this Lent, even for brief moments each day?

Rest

Shepherding God, You lead us to green pastures and quiet waters. You restore our souls and guide us through life’s valleys. Help us to stop running, to hear your voice, and to trust your care. Teach us to rest in your goodness, to receive your mercy, and to follow you with hearts open to life and love. Amen.

About the Author

Jessie has served as the solo Pastor of Christ Our Anchor Presbyterian Church in Annapolis, MD, for the last ten years. She is also a Board-Certified Chaplain with a particular interest in pastoral care. She attended Princeton Seminary for her M.Div, and she serves on the Dismantling Racism Team of Baltimore Presbytery. She is proud to have co-chaired the working group that created a successful proposal for the trailblazing Reparative Justice Fund. [You can read more about that fund here.](#) She is embarking this Spring on her first-ever clergy sabbatical and will love getting more time with her husband, two young children, and larger extended family.



It is Not Too Late

A Reflection for Monday, March 16 by Grace Bala

Lectionary reading for 03/16/2026: [Psalm 146](#); [Isaiah 59:9-19](#); [Acts 9:1-20](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Acts 9:1-20

Read

Acts 9:1–20 (NRSV)

¹Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ⁵He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’ ⁷The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹For three days, he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ He answered, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ ¹¹The Lord said to him, ‘Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment, he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.’ ¹³But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.’ ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’ ¹⁷So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days, he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’

Reflect

Saul is on the move and his mission is clear.

He is not confused. He is not conflicted. He is not “wrestling with nuance.”

Saul is certain. Certain that he is defending the God of his people. Certain that there is a threat that must be contained. Certain that coercion, backed by law and authority, is righteousness and that a ‘warrant’ is justification.

He is breathing threats. The Greek suggests something visceral—like violence is the air in his lungs. Violence to accompany his “cause” is no longer an action. It is embodied.

And then, light.

This light is not a gentle nudge or a well-reasoned counterargument. It is a collapse. Saul’s embodied self is stopped by a voice calling his name twice, the way God does when something irreversible is about to happen.

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

The question is not, “Why are you wrong politically?”

It is not, “Why are you misinformed?”

It is, “Why are you harming me?”

Saul embodies violence. God embodies the target of that violence.

This revelation reframes everything. It reframes detention without due process. It reframes the quiet erosion of civil norms. It reframes the slow drip of withheld information, the closed doors, the power moves that feel untouchable. If Christ identifies himself with the vulnerable, then harm done in the name of order is still harm.

Surprisingly, Saul does not argue back. He cannot see.

Blindness, here, is mercy. It stops him.

In this reading, I am reminded of an idea that feels like both confession and invitation: *You are allowed to say at any point that I don’t support this. Even if you did. Even if you were unsure. You can say this has gone too far. And while the best time to say this was earlier, the second best time is now.*

Saul could have stopped earlier. Before the letters. Before the arrests. Before the fear he spread. But the road to Damascus is not too late.

He has to be led by the hand into the city. Saul, the strong man, is suddenly vulnerable, even dependent on others.

And then there is Ananias.

Ananias is often bypassed as simply a means to an end, a vehicle for transformation. But imagine the tremor in his body when God says, “Go to Saul.” Saul is the very man who has

been detaining Ananias' friends. He has legal backing. He believes he is right and will kill to protect that belief.

And still, Ananias goes.

He even calls Saul "Brother."

That word is resistance.

It is not flashy resistance but rather is embodied faithfulness. A hand laid on a former enemy. Scales falling. Sight returning. A life redirected.

Miraculously, Saul does not disappear into private regret. He changes course publicly. The energy that once fueled persecution now fuels proclamation. The certainty remains—but it has been broken open and remade by an encounter.

I think about the current climate. The way rhetoric hardens. The way power consolidates. The way people on every side double down rather than fall down.

What would it look like for us to allow interruption?

To say, even late, even awkwardly, even at relational cost: This has gone too far.

Conversion is not about winning arguments. It is about ceasing harm. It is about asking where Christ is standing—and adjusting accordingly.

Sometimes the light feels blinding. Sometimes repentance feels humiliating. Sometimes we are Saul. Sometimes we are Ananias. Sometimes we are the ones praying in the dark, waiting for someone to show up.

The story insists: transformation is still possible.

It is not too late.

Respond

Name where harm is being done and refuse to normalize it. Advocate for due process, dignity, and transparency in the spaces where you have a voice. And at home, practice quiet resistance—teach your child to love their neighbor, to notice who is excluded, to ask gentle questions about power and fairness. Small faithfulness forms future courage.

Rest

Christ who meets us on the road,

Interrupt our certainty.

Expose where we participate in harm.

Give us courage to say, "No more," even now.

Make us brave enough to change.

And tender enough to call former enemies "brother" and "sister."

Amen.

About the Author



Grace Bala (she/her) is a millennial mom, hospital chaplain and lifetime student located in Pennsylvania. A recovering people pleaser, Grace is moved to action by injustice and has had her fair share of "not too late" transformations. When not working, she enjoys reading and taking "puddle jumping" walks in the rain with her toddler.

Building the Kingdom Together

A Reflection for Tuesday, March 17 by Rev. Madison J. McAleese

Lectionary reading for 03/17/2026: [Psalm 146](#); [Isaiah 42:14-21](#); [Colossians 1:9-14](#);

Selected Passage for Reflection: Colossians 1:9-14

Read

Colossians 1:9-14 *New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition*

9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's[a] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled[b] you[c] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.[d]

Reflect

How many of us can say that if we were imprisoned, we would be inspired to write to fellow Christians with encouragement and love? It may seem hard to grasp, but for Paul, it was second nature. While imprisoned, Paul pens this letter, encouraging the church in Colossae to keep their eyes on Jesus and to keep following the righteous path. How? Paul offers them a simple solution: bear good fruit, be strengthened through God's power, have patience in God's timing, and give thanks. These are all difficult concepts to grasp in daily life, let alone while incarcerated, but Paul knows something the rest of the community didn't quite grasp yet. He knew about the Kingdom of God.

Paul is reminding us here of the lightness and great joy that can exist in the knowledge that we are redeemed, that the Kingdom of God reigns, despite the sorrows of this life. But what does this mean for daily life? It means we must recognize that the Kingdom has been ushered in not in the future, not for the next life, not at some later time, but for the here and now. By saying we have been "transferred" into the Kingdom, he's telling us it has already been inaugurated here on earth! Christians often focus on the future and on the next life as if there is no hope for this world. There's the common thought that we are just passing through this earth, and all we have to do is hang on and prepare for the next life.

But it isn't so! We have the great news that through Jesus, God's Kingdom is present here, and available for us now, and it is our job to be a part of the liberating power of God that brings the

full world into harmony with him. We are co-creators with the God of the universe. Isn't that great news, indeed?

Respond

Where do you see evidence of the Kingdom of God all around you? Take a few moments each day this week to notice where heaven is breaking through the darkness.

Now, how can *you* be a part of that work? Is there an action you can take to love others more deeply, to serve as a compassionate presence, and to be the hands and feet of Jesus here on earth?

Rest

God of light and joy, we are grateful for your Kingdom, for the knowledge of your redemption and your vision for peace. Strengthen our wisdom of your presence and help us to bear good fruit always, having patience in your goodness, and bearing witness to your glory. Let us be co-builders of the new heavens and new earth, doing everything we can in all love and compassion to make it on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Madison Jones McAleese is a priest, social impact leader, and nonprofit executive director. She is an ordained priest through the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America and presides at her local Dignity Chapter. She has a Master's in Christian Studies and is completing her dissertation for her Doctorate in Social Transformation. Rev. Madison is also the Executive Director of FCM (Federation of Christian Ministries). She lives with her wife and dog, Bubbles, in Burbank, CA. You can find her at www.madisonjonesmcaleese.com.

Praise the Lord, My Soul

A Reflection for Wednesday, March 18, by Rev. Natasha Westerhoud

Lectionary reading for 03/18/2026: Psalm 146; Isaiah 60:17-22; Matthew 9:27-34
Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 146

Read

Psalm 146

¹ Praise the LORD.^[a]

Praise the LORD, my soul.

² I will praise the LORD all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

³ Do not put your trust in princes,
in human beings, who cannot save.

⁴ When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.

⁵ Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God.

⁶ He is the Maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them—

he remains faithful forever.

⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets prisoners free,
⁸ the LORD gives sight to the blind,
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,

the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ The LORD watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

¹⁰ The LORD reigns forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the LORD.

Reflect

I'm so thankful to trust in the One who stays faithful forever, bringing justice to the oppressed, feeding the hungry, freeing prisoners, watching over strangers, supporting the fatherless and widows, opening the eyes of the blind, and lifting those who are struggling. There's no one else I'd rather trust, yet sometimes I find myself wandering and getting lost. I try to handle things that feel overwhelming, or I take my eyes off the only One who can help, hoping someone else will come to my rescue. About a month ago, I received some tough news. At first, I didn't turn to the One who promises eternal faithfulness, who SUSTAINS and lifts me. Instead, I spiraled into anxiety and restless nights, trying to control everything. I leaned on others but forgot the One who truly knows me best. When I finally paused and took a deep breath, I turned my eyes back

to Jesus, and He gently reminded me of His goodness and constant faithfulness. He has never abandoned me and remains faithful forever. Only then could I sleep peacefully, comforted in the knowledge that God is watching over me.

Psalm 146 is a song of reorientation and an invitation to trust not in ever-changing powers, disappointing plans, or those who cannot save, but in the living God who remains faithful forever. Psalm 146 gently warns us: *“Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.”* During Lent, we are asked to consider what we rely on for security, whether it be our routines, achievements, illusion of control, or even the approval or advice of others. These “princes” are not necessarily people; they can be anything we hope will support us but ultimately cannot bear the weight of our souls.

Respond

Psalm 146 demonstrates God’s active faithfulness: uplifting those who are hurting, sustaining the weary, and caring for the unseen. It’s comforting to realize God’s reign isn’t distant but quietly and persistently breaking in, even amid wilderness or fragile moments. Take a moment to check in with your soul. Does it feel thin, cracked, or tired? This is an invitation to turn to praise. Not because life is easy, but because God remains faithful.

Rest

Father, we rest knowing you are the maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in between. You remain faithful, and we put our trust in you and praise you as you watch over us. Amen.



About the Author

Natasha follows Jesus’ teachings by living with love, compassion, generosity, and radical hospitality. As an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada, she serves as a chaplain, caring for residents and families. Deeply passionate about pastoral care, she founded Soul Care Ministries, offering inspiring workshops and mental health support around the world. She is also a trauma and attachment counsellor, currently studying for a degree in Spiritual Care. Married to Mike for 30 years, they have two beloved children, Hana and Eli, after a heartfelt journey of waiting and crossing oceans to adopt. She openly shared her adoption stories in [‘The Mom Quilt,’](#) with proceeds supporting The Mercy House in Kenya, helping pregnant girls in need.

Out of the Depths, Indeed!

A Reflection for Thursday, March 19 by Rev. Elizabeth Jones

Lectionary reading for 03/19/2026: [Psalm 130](#), [Ezekiel 1:1-3](#), [Revelation 11:15-19](#):

Selected Passage: Psalm 130

Read

Psalm 130 *New Revised Standard Version*

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the
morning,

more than those who watch for the
morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Reflect

There's nothing like an emergency room or a critical care unit in a hospital to give a person a kind of perspective, a window into suffering and pain, on all different levels.

In the depths. Overwhelmed by the chaotic waters. It's real. It hits home. This is where some people are regularly at, more often than any of us would like to admit.

When we read Psalm 130, we aren't sure whether it's the depths of sorrow or grief, or the depths of emotional frustration or psychological pain, or a combination of all of the above. This psalm is a window onto the psalmist's soul, which is about to split in two.

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever cried to God from the depths of suffering and pain? I know I have, and it is painful. Horrible. I don't care to remember it, most of the time, so I pack it away and submerge what unpleasant memories I have in some inner part of my mind.

Sometimes, life stinks. Some might ask, how can it get worse?

The psalmist tells us how, in verse three. Just when we thought life was really rotten, sin can take center stage, making matters even worse. Sometimes, I can let the sins I commit every day really get under my skin. It isn't always the huge sins; it can be the little ones, too. The white lies, losing my temper, and ignoring people. These are little slips of thought, word, and deed. Oh, and the bigger sins, too.

What would happen if God were to keep a balance sheet, with all of the good, pleasing deeds I've done in one column, and all the bad, evil, nasty things I'm guilty of in the other? I'd imagine I would keep some angelic bookkeeper pretty busy, keeping track of all the petty little bad things I do each and every day, as well as the occasional good things.

Thank God that God does not keep balance sheets, and weigh the good versus the bad in my life. Thank God I am forgiven! Did you hear that declaration? "But there is forgiveness with You, so that You may be revered." God loves this psalm writer so much that God is willing to forgive.

Then, there is a shift. The psalm writer shifts from the personal to the corporate body. It's like the psalmist says, "Hey, Israel!!! If God can forgive me of my iniquities, surely God can forgive all y'all, too!" See, the LORD does have steadfast love. It isn't just wishful thinking. God is ready to redeem all God's people from all their iniquities, to embrace them in God's everlasting arms.

This is good news for us today. Not only will God forgive our sins and iniquities, but God will be there to help us through the rough places, the difficult things, the frustrating circumstances, the painful heartaches. God has indeed promised to be there for us.

What a promise. What assurance. What a God. Amen!

Respond

Just as God does not keep heavenly balance sheets on me or on you, so we do not need to keep track of good deeds versus bad deeds done to us. How freeing, and how wonderful! Who can you help through difficult times? Who needs a hand to travel through rough places today? Please, be that helping hand. And, if you can be kind and merciful to others, do that, too!

Rest

Dear Lord, sometimes life is hard. Sometimes, life downright stinks. But Lord, You are right there in the middle of things! You come through, and can walk beside us, sit right next to us, even, going through the darkest valleys. You are right by our side. Thank You, God, for never leaving us nor forsaking us. What a God You are, indeed! I know it hardly seems adequate in the least, but – thanks. Thanks so much. Amen.

About the Author



The Rev. Elizabeth Jones is a full-time hospice chaplain in Chicago, is a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor (IAODAPCA), and is working on a DMin in spiritual direction. Elizabeth has a loving husband who is a senior editor, four curious and strong-minded adult children, and two adorable grandchildren.

A Glimpse of the Kingdom: Awe, Worship, and the Good Road Ahead

A Reflection for Friday, March 20 By Rev. Jeannette Conver

Lectionary reading for 03/20/2026: [Psalm 130](#); [Ezekiel 33:10-16](#); [Revelation 11:15-19](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Revelation 11:15-19 (*First Nation's Version*)

Read

Revelation 11:15-19

¹⁵*Then when the seventh spirit-messenger sounded his eagle bone whistle, I heard loud voices in the spirit-world above.*

“The power to rule this world now belongs to our Great Spirit Chief and to his Chosen One,” the voices thundered, “and the guidance of his good road will last beyond the end of all days.”

¹⁶Then the twenty-four elders, who sit in seats of honor before Creator, fell face down on the ground to give honor to the Great Spirit.

¹⁷“We offer thanks to you, O honored One,” they said *with one voice*. “You are the All-Powerful One, Who Is and Was, for you have received your great power and established your good road.

¹⁸The nations were furious, but now the time of your fierce anger has come. It is time for you to decide the fate of the dead and to honor the ones who serve you—both prophets and holy ones—all who have deep respect for your name, from the smallest to the greatest among us. *And it is time for you to bring to an end the ones who have brought destruction to the land.*”

¹⁹Then I looked and saw that the *way into* Creator’s sacred lodge in the spirit-world above was open. Inside the lodge the cedar box of the peace treaty came into view. Lightning flashed with the sound of crashing thunder, and the earth shook while large hailstones fell from the sky.

Reflect

The apostle John does his best in this Scripture to give us a glimpse into the awe-inspiring moment when heavenly voices thunder out, “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever.” I have to admit that when I hear the words of verse 15 in a traditional English translation, I am immediately immersed in the majestic, soaring music of the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*. I am transported to the alto section of a massed chorus, overlooking a full orchestra in a massive cathedral. Chills run down my body from head to foot. I shout God’s praise with all my might.

This music was the composer, George Frideric Handel's vision of God's presence in all its radiance and glory. And just as the twenty-four elders fall on their faces in worship, so this piece of music has evoked worship and awe in audiences for centuries.

Give us a glimpse into the awe-inspiring moment when heavenly voices thunder out, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever." I have to admit that when I hear the words of verse 15 in a traditional English translation, I am immediately immersed in the majestic, soaring music of the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*. I am transported to the alto section of a massed chorus, overlooking a full orchestra in a massive cathedral. Chills run down my body from head to foot. I shout God's praise with all my might. This music was the composer, George Frideric Handel's vision of God's presence in all its radiance and glory. And just as the twenty-four elders fall on their faces in worship, so this piece of music has evoked worship and awe in audiences for centuries.

But I felt I needed a fresh look at these verses—and the First Nations Version, an indigenous translation of the New Testament, gave me just that. The words still carry the sense of awe John experienced as he heard and saw this vision. He is overcome by the power of the thundering voices that declare that at last, the power to rule the world belongs completely to the Great Spirit Chief and his Chosen One.

Then I was impressed by the words "good road." The All-Powerful One has established a good road for us to walk. Oh how we long for a good way through the chaos and wars all around our world—a way that is just and right. Even though the nations are furious—bringing down their anger upon their citizens and neighbors—God has revealed God's great power to bring this destruction of the land to an end. An indigenous perspective of the good road God establishes includes the ultimate good of all creation—the land included. No more unnatural disasters—no more famine, drought, fire, or flood. No more war, violence, and injustice. What a beautiful hope awaits us!

John continues with the affirmation that all of us who have deep respect for God's name, from the smallest to the greatest, will be honored. No one will be overlooked, insignificant, or marginalized ever again.

The vision ends with a glimpse into the sacred lodge in the spirit world. There, John sees the covenant, a peace treaty between God and humanity. God's covenant will be renewed. Worship and praise will be unhindered. God's goodness will have free rein on the earth. God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

Respond



John had this hope-inspiring vision during a time of persecution, violence, and enemy occupation. He heard voices proclaiming that God's power for good will at last come in completeness. What reminds you of God's power and goodness? Walk out in nature and praise the Creator God for the beauty of the land. Listen to the "Hallelujah" Chorus. Look at this painting of the seventh angel from John's vision.

Rest

Our God, the Chosen One, sometimes I lose sight of your good road that leads me into the future. Please remind me of your promise to make all things new and good! Thanks be to God.

About the Author



Jeannette is the mother of four amazing adults and two outstanding grandchildren. She lives in the Skagit Valley of Washington state-- near majestic mountains, restless ocean waves, and tulips. Lead pastor of Community Covenant Church, she loves the beauty of words and nature and finds joy in riotous color. She's always ready for coffee and conversation, or a game of UNO.

Embracing the Depths: A Journey Through Lament and Hope

A Reflection for Saturday, March 21 By Rev. Christy Bouris

Lectionary reading for 03/21/2026: [Psalm 130](#); [Ezekiel 36:8-15](#); [Luke 24:44-53](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 130

Read

Psalm 130 *NRSV Updated Edition*

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD; my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord

more than those who watch for the
morning,

more than those who watch for the
morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast
love,
and with him is great power to
redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities

Reflect

The words of this psalm transported me back to camp. In college, I spent summers working at a Christian camp and remember learning a new worship song based on this text. As I remembered the song, something struck me. The song began in the same spirit as the text, and we sang, "From the depths of woe, I raise to Thee a voice of lamentation." As you hear these words, what kind of tune would you expect to accompany words like that? Decades after my first introduction to the song, I am newly confounded by the absolutely bizarre arrangement we sang. Imagine singing these words along with a catchy, rhythmic acoustic guitar in a major key with a dancy little rhythm between each verse. Why didn't it seem off to me then when I was singing words (in the first person!) about crying out from the depths, all while jamming on my guitar, leading a room full of clapping teenagers? Why was a text like this - a lament - set to upbeat, fast-paced guitar chords?

Now, in retrospect, I imagine it's at least partially because the kind of tune that would fit this psalm text would need to be dark, slow, and unresolved. And, as Martin Marty reflects, "Talking about a cry from the depths does not fit into a theology that markets well, as theology is supposed to do today."¹ Perhaps a different (more appropriate) tune would have been uncomfortable to sing.

That is because being in the depths is, to put it mildly, uncomfortable. And witnessing someone else in that place can be challenging as well. In our feel-good culture, it's tempting to present an "I have it all together" picture. And if things aren't all together, at least we should do our best not to be too much of a Debbie Downer. Since we are taught to "look on the bright side," hearing someone speak honestly about being in the depths can be striking and unnerving. The psalmist's words are stark, unfiltered, unapologetic, and direct.

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!

The depths are real—life is deeply beautiful *and* deeply distressing. Sometimes we don't have it all together. In these moments, it is tempting to mask our own situation or, when someone else is in the depths, to try to fix their situation. When facing the depths, I'm learning to intentionally pause. To let the depths be what they are. I try not to jump quickly to fixing, alleviating, or moving the conversation along to solutions. I try (and don't always succeed at) listening to the voices crying from the depths (this includes listening to my own voice!). I try not to be distracted by whatever is accompanying those in the depths - whether it is energetic guitar chords or a friend's forced optimism. Let's not distract ourselves or others in the depths. Let's acknowledge those who are waiting in the depths for morning. Let's become more comfortable in the uncomfortable depths.

Waiting in the depths is part of life, and it is not antithetical to the Christian life. Jesus himself was there. In the wilderness. When he wept. When his friend died. In the Garden of Gethsemane. The psalmist frees us to be in the depths and to cry out, without shame. And with God there is steadfast love in the depths.

¹ Martin E. Marty "Psalm 130" in *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, edited by Bartlett David Lyon and Barbara Brown Taylor. 1st ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2008.

Respond

Where do you find yourself this Lenten season?

If you find yourself waiting in the depths:

The psalmist's position and punctuation give you permission to be free. To be honest. With yourself, with others, with God. To cry out! To scream! To swear! It isn't odd or strange to find yourself in the depths. It's very human. Release your reality to God without reservation, knowing that with God there is steadfast love.

Invitation: Find physical space and time today to cry out to God.

If you are on level ground:

Look around. Let's notice the depths around us. Be with those who are there. Cry out with them! Wait with them with God for the morning while it is still dark. Let's discipline ourselves to sit in the minor keys that are a part of life. Invitation: consider the depths around you - in your neighborhood, your larger community, in our world. How might you wait with others in the depths?

Rest

Redeeming God,

Help us! We are waiting for and with you. Amen.

About the Author



Christy is an ordained pastor and lover of kalamata olives. She continues to hold to her New England roots by drinking water from bubblers while enjoying life with her family in the Midwest. On a good day, you'll find her sitting in the sun with a warm cup of tea, listening to music next to a good friend.

Breath in the Valley

A Reflection for The Fifth Sunday of Lent by Aisha Cox

Lectionary reading for 03/22/2026: [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#), [Psalm 130](#), [Romans 8:6-11](#), [John 11:1-45](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Read

Ezekiel 37:1-14 NLT

The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD to a valley filled with bones. **2** He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. **3** Then he asked me, “Son of man, can these bones become living people again?”

“O Sovereign LORD,” I replied, “you alone know the answer to that.”

4 Then he said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, ‘Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! **5** This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! **6** I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.’”

7 So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. **8** Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.’”

10 So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.

11 Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, ‘We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.’ **12** Therefore, prophesy to them and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. **13** When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the LORD. **14** I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the LORD has spoken!’”

Reflect

If you have ever taken a CPR or first aid class, you know one of the first things you are taught is the importance of breath.

I remember learning this firsthand in high school, when I took an elective class on first aid and CPR. We practiced the steps on training mannequins, checking for breathing, giving chest compressions, and learning how to push air back into the lungs. The instructor emphasized something that has stayed with me. When someone stops breathing, every second matters. The body may still be there, but without breath, life cannot continue.

Breath is essential. Without it, everything stops.

That is what makes the vision in Ezekiel 37 so striking.

In this passage, the prophet Ezekiel is led by the Spirit of God into a valley filled with bones. Not just bones, but bones that are described as very dry. They are scattered across the valley floor, lifeless and disconnected. It is a scene that looks like the end of the story. For the people of Israel in exile, it certainly felt that way. Their hope had dried up, their future felt uncertain, and their identity as God's people seemed shattered.

Standing in that valley, God asks Ezekiel a surprising question.

“Son of man, can these bones live?”

Ezekiel responds with humility.

“Sovereign Lord, you alone know.”

Then God does something unexpected. He tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, to speak the word of the Lord into a place that appears completely beyond repair. When Ezekiel obeys, the valley erupts with sound. “There was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together.” (v.7)

What once lay scattered begins to move. Bones reconnect. Tendons and flesh appear. Bodies take shape. Yet something is still missing. They remain lifeless. Structure has returned, but breath has not.

So God commands Ezekiel again, this time to prophesy to the breath. The Hebrew word used here is *ruach*, which can mean breath, wind, or spirit. When the breath enters them, life returns, and they stand on their feet. What was once a valley of death becomes a vast army.

This vision points beyond Israel's restoration. It foreshadows the hope we hold as we journey through Lent toward Easter. The God who breathes life into dry bones is the same God who brings life out of a sealed tomb.

Throughout the passage, God repeats a phrase. “Then you will know that I am the Lord.” The miracle makes it unmistakably clear who holds the power over life and death.

Many of us have valleys in our own lives, places that feel dry, scattered, and beyond repair. Yet this vision reminds us that no situation is too far gone for God.

When God speaks, things begin to move.
When His Spirit breathes, life returns.

The same breath that filled that valley still moves today. As resurrection Sunday draws near, Ezekiel's vision invites us to believe again. The God who restores dry bones is still the God who raises the dead.

Respond

Where in your life do you see “dry bones,” and how might God be inviting you to trust Him to breathe new life there?

Rest

Lord, just as you breathed life into the valley of dry bones, breathe your Spirit into the dry places of our lives. Give us faith to trust you in seasons that feel hopeless and courage to believe that you are still at work. Amen.

About the Author



Aisha is an authentic speaker and leader who is devoted to creating spaces where people feel seen and known by God. She preaches God's word with boldness, vulnerability, and a deep sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Aisha is the founder and leader of *Authentically Arise*, a vibrant movement that creates spaces for women to grow in their faith, cultivate their gifts, and authentically arise into the women God created them to be. She's married to her best friend Maurice, and they live in San Antonio, Texas with their two children.

Lord, Hear My Prayer

A Reflection for Monday, March 23 by Sara Simonds

Lectionary reading for 03/23/2026: [Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 143

Read

Psalm 143, NIV

A psalm of David.

- 1** LORD, hear my prayer,
listen to my cry for mercy;
in your faithfulness and righteousness
come to my relief.
- 2** Do not bring your servant into judgment,
for no one living is righteous before
you.
- 3** The enemy pursues me,
he crushes me to the ground;
he makes me dwell in the darkness
like those long dead.
- 4** So my spirit grows faint within me;
my heart within me is dismayed.
- 5** I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works
and consider what your hands have
done.
- 6** I spread out my hands to you;
I thirst for you like a parched land.^[a]
- 7** Answer me quickly, LORD;
my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me
or I will be like those who go down to
the pit.

8 Let the morning bring me word of your
unfailing love,
for I have put my trust in you.
Show me the way I should go,
for to you I entrust my life.

9 Rescue me from my enemies, LORD,
for I hide myself in you.

10 Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God;
may your good Spirit
lead me on level ground.

11 For your name's sake, LORD, preserve
my life;
in your righteousness, bring me out of
trouble.

12 In your unfailing love, silence my
enemies;
destroy all my foes,
for I am your servant.

Reflect

I started 2026 with the intention of establishing a Bible study ritual in my daily routine. I had recently left my corporate job and was about to turn 40, so the beginning of a new year felt like the right time to establish a routine that would structure my morning the “right” way. This was a grand plan, and the thought of a daily bible study felt daunting—where to start, what to read, how much time do I need to set aside in my day to be perfect in this practice? I tackled this like any good millennial, and I started doing research—what do others on the internet suggest that I do? What guides can I buy to help with this daily practice? I have asked friends for years for guidance on a bible study format, guidance on how to pray. In general, I was asking, how do I do better at this God thing?!

In my research, I came across a suggestion to read the Psalms. Start with Psalm 1 and read one Psalm a day. It clicked for me and helped me with this morning's structure, which I was striving for. Time with God is not something extra that needs to be purchased; it is not something perfect that must be done in an exact way every day. It is more about making space for God and the time in your day to pause and reflect. It is a time for you to Pray and there is no right or wrong way to structure your time with God.

Too often, we are afraid to start because we don't want to get it wrong, but even one small step will add up to movement forward. Psalm 143 is a prayer for our mornings when we feel desperate, need a little more guidance, or face trials in our daily lives. There is no quick fix or bible study to create the perfect prayer or to become the perfect person; there is simply staying the course and trying the next day again. Prayer is not your chance to ask God for whatever you want, but it is your chance to talk to God and get to know God better.

It is easy to walk away from God or from a difficult situation by blaming God, but in this season of Lent, let us turn to God and acknowledge that, while life may not be easy, it is beautiful, and every day is a lesson that teaches us to trust in God. We will all have trials and tribulations in our lives, and this year has taught me that I need to make space for God and give myself time to reflect and pray, not protest and walk away.

Respond

We will all have trials in our lives, so let us learn how to respond and remember to turn to God in our trials, not away from God. This week, as you are experiencing trials, take a minute to breathe and turn to God with a heartfelt prayer. If prayer feels far from your mind, use Psalm 143 to guide your prayer.

Rest

Lord, thank you for this reminder that we are all human and we will all experience trials in our lives. When life is hard, remind me to turn to you. When life is easy, remind me to turn to you. Give me the grace to understand that others are experiencing trials and to guide me to do your will. Amen.



About the Author

Sara Simonds is a mother and wife in the Atlanta area who is an active member at Shallowford Presbyterian Church. She is a recovering corporate working mom and using this time to read the bible, reflect on the impact of religion in her life, and enjoy a slower pace as much as she can with two small children.

Zombie Apocalypse and the Reviving Love of God

A Reflection for Tuesday, March 24 by Sarah Roquemore Day

Lectionary reading for 03/24/2026: [Psalm 143](#); [2 Kings 4:18-37](#); [Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

Selected Passage: Ephesians 2:1-10

Read

Ephesians 2:1-10 English Standard Version

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course[of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Reflect

A few years ago, I was teaching *Romeo and Juliet* to a 9th-grade English class. To give our unit some contemporary relevance, I assigned my students a choice of ancillary texts, including young-adult adaptations of Shakespeare's 400-year-old classic. Of these spins, the most unique was *Warm Bodies*² by Isaac Marion. The book is narrated by R, a zombie who falls in love with a human named Julie. At the start of the novel, R's thoughts are muddy, his language garbled and choppy, his emotions flat, but one taste of love³ sets in motion a transformation that eventually restores his humanity. Through R's point of view, we experience the return of R's senses and language as love brings him back to life.

The first three verses of Ephesians 3 read like a Zombie novel to me. Maybe it's the repetition of the words "dead" and "flesh", or the image of "children of wrath" mindlessly following "the prince of power of the air," but I can't help but picture a bunch of hollow-faced Ephesians walking the earth, growling... "mmm, braaaaaains!"

² [Also a movie](#)

³ Literally. R falls in love with Julie after eating his boyfriend's brain & experiences his memories of her. What a meet-cute!

Often, when we think of sin, we think of the specific and deliberate actions we take in opposition to God: the “things done and left undone” that Christians in liturgical traditions kneel to confess each week. But in this context, sin is not just about individual, intentional actions: it is a collective disease of the mind, a Zombie epidemic that malforms us into wrathful and inhuman creatures, numb to the spirit of God that was made to move within us.

In *Warm Bodies*, R reanimates as he experiences love and connection with a living being. In the same way, the life and love of Jesus are the antidote to death within our souls and the world. By “raising us up and seating us with God in heaven,” Jesus gives us the life we were always meant to have, one where we experience intimacy with God, community with others, and beauty in creation. We were not made to wander the world in unrest, propelled by hunger and scarcity. We were made to flourish and bless the world with the “good work” God has prepared for us.

Respond

Read the text again and take some time to journal or meditate over the following questions:

- In what areas of your life do you find yourself living like a zombie? Are there any thought patterns or habits that you have adopted mindlessly?
- What does it mean to be seated with God? Where might God be calling you to sit and rest in intimacy and trust?
- What does it mean for you to recognize that you are God’s workmanship? How does this identity change your perception of yourself?
- What “good works” do you feel God calling you into during this season of Lent? How might you play a part in reviving a dead world with God’s goodness, grace, and love?

Rest

Living God,

Giver of Life.

Maker of heaven and earth.

In the garden, you created us, breathed life into our lungs, and called us Good.

Though sin pulls us towards death and wrath, your grace calls us to life and intimacy, seating us at your side.

Today, may we breathe in your reviving love and awaken anew to our identity as your beautiful workmanship, compelled to bring your goodness to life in the world.

About the Author



Sarah Roquemore Day is a middle school drama teacher who sometimes writes, too. Growing up, she drove Sunday school teachers and youth pastors crazy with her constant questions and need for further information. Today, she continues to be curious about the complex nuances of scripture and theology, reading the Bible critically while staying open to the mystery and wonder of the Holy Spirit. Sarah lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband Bob. She has recently entered her auntie era and loves doting on her precious nieces, Kellyn and Kai-Ling.

The redemption, promise, and faithfulness of God

A Reflection for Wednesday, March 25 by Rev. Katherine Mayer

Lectionary reading for 03/25/2026: Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41; Matthew 22:23-33

Selected passage for reflection: Jeremiah 32:36-41

Read

Jeremiah 32: 36-41 (NRSV)

You are saying about this city, 'By the sword, famine and plague it will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon'; but this is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all their heart and soul'.

Reflect

As I read the passage, I had three things stick out to me: God's redemption, promise and faithfulness. All three can be found in the story of Israel, but they can also be found in our story.

God is telling Jeremiah that He will bring the people of Israel back to the land He promised them. He is going to gather them from all the places they were driven and bring them back together. They will no longer be in captivity. They will no longer be separated from one another. They will no longer be refugees and nomads; they will be home. They will be redeemed. This land that was taken from them will become a place of safety. It will be a place where they can dwell and make new memories. Just like Israel, there are times in our lives when God brings us back and redeems us. What once was old is made new. New life is breathed into old dreams, and past memories are redeemed and used for God's glory. We are brought back to a place where God can redeem what once was.

In this redemptive love seen in Jeremiah, we also see God's promise. God promises Israel that they will be brought back to the land that they once called home. Keep in mind that some generations here have never seen this land, yet He promises them that they will live there in safety. Every promise that God has made Israel is wrapped up in this one promise: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God". This promise holds the redemption that the people of Israel experience time and time again. It is a promise for us also. We are God's people and He is our God. He offered us the greatest act of redemptive love when He sent Jesus. As Jesus

gave up His life for us, we are promised and marked just as Israel was. We are marked with the promise that we are God's people and He is our God. This promise is a redemptive love that brings about transformation. When we experience God's redemption, we are transformed. The people of Israel were marked by God, and they were transformed each time they experienced His redemption, and the same happens for us. We are transformed by the redemption that God gave us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Lastly, God is consistently faithful to Israel. Throughout their story, you see the same cycle repeated generation after generation. They have moments when they live in freedom, communing with God, and then there are moments in captivity, where the people of Israel are crying out for God to rescue them. The beauty is that God is always with them. No matter how far they turn or how far they run, God remains faithful. He never turns His back on them; instead, he chases after them. He does the same with us. No matter how far we may run or what we might do, God is always there. He remains faithful. God remains steadfast and faithful. No matter how far we run or how hard we push, nothing is going to separate us from the steadfast, faithful love of God.

The redemption, promise, and faithfulness of God that we see given to Israel in the book of Jeremiah is the same that we experience because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. It is through the cross that we truly know the redemptive love of God. It is through the resurrection of Christ that we are promised eternity with God. It is through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ that we experience, first-hand, the faithfulness of God. That is the beauty of the cross. That is what we celebrate and reflect on during this Lenten season.

Response

During this Lenten season, take the time to reflect on the redemptive love you experience day after day. Take time to reflect on the promises that God has given you. Where does God meet you? What promises has God given you? How do you experience God's redemptive love? Where do you see God's faithfulness? Whether you are in the valley or on the mountain top, give God praise for the redemption, promise, and faithfulness you have in God.

Take a moment and listen to the song "How to be yours", by Chris Renzema. Imagine the song as the people of Israel talking to God, and reflect on how God responds later in the song.

Rest

May we remember God, that your love is not for us alone. May we bless others with the same grace and mercy you have shown us, even when they have wronged us. Thank you, God, for your redemptive love and the promise that it brings. Thank you for your faithfulness even when we turn our faces from you. May your Kingdom come and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

About the Author



Katherine Mayer is a pastor, wife, mom, and Spiritual Director. A year ago, she stepped down from her position as an Associate Pastor at her church to focus on raising her kids and her own health. Being called out of her position was not something she expected, but it has been an unexpected gift from the Lord.

Called to Community

A Reflection for Thursday, March 26 by Rev. Alicia Vela Anderson

Lectionary reading for 03/26/2026: [Psalm 31:9-16](#); [1 Samuel 16:11-13](#); [Philippians 1:1-11](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Philippians 1:3-11

Read

Philippians 1:3-11, NRSVUE

I thank my God for every remembrance of you, always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, for all of you are my partners in God's grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the tender affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Reflect

This section of Paul's letter to the Philippians has long been a favorite of mine. A phrase of it was written in a note of encouragement given to me upon my college graduation by my mentor: "Being confident of this, that the One who began a good work in you will continue." Later, as I discovered the rest of the passage, it became a prayer over my students in my youth ministry. I quoted it so often that a group of students gave me a Christmas Ornament with the words "Carry On" painted on it as a call back to this passage.

If we are confident that God began a good work in us as individuals, all we are doing is carrying on. Day by day, following the heart of God through our lives. Sounds easy, right? I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I don't need anyone else - just me and Jesus.

I used to think it was that easy - God's at work in me, I'm doing fine all on my own. That's what happens when we are taught to read scripture as if it is written directly to us. But Paul's writing to a community of people. He's actually telling them that they are interconnected, which is crucial because that's what can keep us going. Paul's prayer is for the people of God to grow in their love so much that it overflows with knowledge and insight to determine what really matters.

While I can read all sorts of books and search the internet for more knowledge and insights, nothing will help me understand others' experiences more than proximity to them. To grasp the

fullness of God, I need to be surrounded by those God created. I need to be connected to them in a way that their burdens become my burdens.

What I've learned is that the more I connect myself to my community, the more my understanding of God grows. This time in our lives is too heavy for anyone to face alone. We are not meant to maintain our spiritual health solely through our own understanding. We have to do it in community with others, and hopefully with those who are different from us.

I still find comfort in verse 6 of this passage - that we can be confident that God is still at work in us until the day of completion, but these days it's a reminder that God continues to bring others into my life for me to learn from. The comfort has changed from "I can do it all" to "We can do things together."

Respond

Where are the places you are truly connected to others? Not places where you simply see others, but places where you listen to the lives of other people. How can you search out new spaces to learn from others? If you don't have any, I encourage you to seek out somewhere you can invest some time in - a book club, a learning opportunity, or a local community group.

If you are already in a space like this, what have you learned recently that has deepened your understanding of God?

Rest

Creator God, thank you that you do not give up on your creation. Thank you for all the ways you carry out your work through the imperfection of humanity. As we go about our week, looking for ways to further our connections to the communities we live in, nudge us out of our comfort zones so that we may know you more. Amen



About the Author

Rev. Alicia Vela Anderson serves as a Spiritual Formation Coach at a nonprofit that builds on the strengths, skills, and potential of young moms. She is passionate about guiding others through discovering the beauty of God in their own stories and journeys. She lives in Chicago, IL, with her husband, where she enjoys exploring, reading, and living locally.

Embracing Silence: Finding God in Our Suffering

A Reflection for Friday, March 27 By Rev. Anna Maloney

Lectionary reading for 3/27/2026: Psalm 31:9-16; Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-20

Selected passage for reflection: Job 13:13-19

Read

Job 13:13-19 NIV

Keep silent and let me speak;
then let come to me what may.
Why do I put myself in jeopardy
and take my life in my hands?
Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;
I will surely defend my ways to his face.
Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance,
for no godless person would dare come before him!
Listen carefully to what I say;
let my words ring in your ears.
Now that I have prepared my case,
I know I will be vindicated.
Can anyone bring charges against me?
If so, I will be silent and die.

Reflect

These words from Job are directed to his well-intentioned, but painfully misguided friends. As they attempt to console Job in his grief and desolation, they try to diagnose him. They are convinced that they know the cause of his suffering and what he can do to fix it.

A little earlier in the chapter, after enduring their speeches and assumptions and a barrage of unsolicited advice, an exasperated Job lets them have it– he says, *“You are worthless physicians, all of you! If only you would be altogether silent! For you, that would be wisdom.”* (Job 13:4-5).

How many times have you wanted to shout something similar to a friend or loved one who was trying to fix instead of truly listening?

When I am in deep pain, I want to be understood and seen– and yet, it is very rarely the words of my friends that meet that need. Instead, it is their presence, their touch, their listening, and

their willingness not to run away or dismiss my suffering that helps me know I am not alone. I wonder— what is it you need when you are feeling sad, hurt, or hopeless?

It strikes me that here in the depths of Job's despair, what he needs from his friends is silence and presence (which, to their credit, they enact beautifully for the first seven days— it's when they open their mouths that it all goes wrong!).

If anyone is to speak a word, let it be from God and God alone. Here at the end of himself, that is what he most deeply desires: a face-to-face encounter with the God who created him and knows the truth about his life.

“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.”

I love the boldness and intimacy we hear in these words; Job is no stranger to God. Like in any honest, real relationship, talking to other people about the issue won't do. Job wants to speak directly to God and to hear what God might say to him.

If you've read to the end of Job, you know that God does indeed speak. God's answer to Job is a litany of questions—some of them quite snarky!— that reveal God's infinite wisdom and power in comparison to our limited understanding and place in the universe.

At the end of it all, Job says, *“My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 41:5-6).*

God is God, and we are not. God invites us to lean into this humbling reality. But here's the beautiful thing— Job's boldness and honesty are honored by God through it all. Job's friends get a strong rebuke from God, but Job's words and prayers are held up as an example of faithfulness. God *wants* us to seek him boldly and directly. God welcomes our honest words, including our anger and our grief. God's deep desire is to know and be known by us— even, and maybe especially, when we are at the very end of ourselves and cannot see a way out.

Respond

What honest words do you need to say to God, face-to-face? Will you have the courage to hear what God might say to you in return?

And, how might you be a supportive, loving presence for one in your life who is suffering? Consider the challenge to simply be a listener, expressing your love and support in an embodied way.

Rest

*God who speaks out of the whirlwind,
You are God, and I am not. Thank you for seeing me and knowing me. I release my need for explanations and control. Thank you for showing me that my suffering matters to you and that I am not alone. In your mercy, hear my prayer.*

About the Author



Rev. Anna Maloney is a pastor and spiritual director. She, her husband, and almost-one-year-old son live in the Twin Cities with their golden retriever pup and their 3 chickens, Angelica, Eliza, and Peggy! Anna is passionate about creating safe space for honest questions and dialogue. She dabbles in poetry, and is a big fan of live music, road trips, and belly laughs with friends.

You Heard My Plea

A Reflection for Saturday, March 28 by Mary Rodriguez

Lectionary reading for 03/28/2026: [Psalm 31:9-16, Lamentations 3:55-66, Mark 10:32-34](#)

Read

Psalm 32:9-16 *New Revised Standard Version*

9 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.
10 For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,[a]
and my bones waste away.
11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror[b] to my neighbours,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;

I have become like a broken vessel.
13 For I hear the whispering of many—
terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.
14 But I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, ‘You are my God.’
15 My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies
and persecutors.
16 Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.

Lamentations 3:55-56, NRSV

55 I called on your name, O Lord,
from the depths of the pit;
56 you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear
to my cry for help, but give me relief!’
57 You came near when I called on you;
you said, ‘Do not fear!’
58 You have taken up my cause, O Lord,
you have redeemed my life.
59 You have seen the wrong done to me, O Lord;
judge my cause.
60 You have seen all their malice,
all their plots against me.

61 You have heard their taunts, O Lord,
all their plots against me.
62 The whispers and murmurs of my assailants
are against me all day long.
63 Whether they sit or rise—see,
I am the object of their taunt-songs.
64 Pay them back for their deeds, O Lord,
according to the work of their hands!
65 Give them anguish of heart;
your curse be on them!
66 Pursue them in anger and destroy them
from under the Lord’s heavens.

Mark 10:32-34, *NRSV*

32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; 34 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.'

Reflect

How does God respond to our suffering?

Our readings from Psalms and Lamentations today speak from a place of suffering. Of grief. Of distress. Of terror. From the depths of despair. The writer of the Psalm hopes for God's deliverance and favor for themselves. The writer of the Lamentation asks for payback, curses, and destruction for their enemies.

That sounds familiar. Relief from troubles. Retribution for grievances. Vengeance for the violence committed. And if I'm honest, yes, I'll have what they're having, please.

However, let us remember that Jesus makes it clear what his response is along the road to Jerusalem. Jesus knows that his entry to a Roman-occupied city, a city under authoritarian rule, a city for which he weeps, will be counter-cultural. It will be a sign of protest, and will give hope to many observers that indeed, God may finally deliver them. Jesus is walking forward with purpose. Those who follow him are afraid.

What comfort does Jesus give the frightened disciples? Not the message of salvation from suffering, nor of God vanquishing adversaries.

Jesus will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Romans; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again. Jesus intends to join those suffering the most under authoritarian oppression and imperial rule. He goes to suffer and die alongside the people.

The good news that Jesus shares: God hears your plea. God suffers alongside you. You are not alone. God joins you in this, too.

Respond

There is so much suffering in our world, in our country, and at the hands of our country. How would God respond? Certainly, to be alongside those who are suffering and dying.

As we are called to follow Christ, in what ways can you come alongside the suffering? Can you advocate for change? Protest? Vote? Donate? Do without so you can share resources with those in need? Call a friend? Sit with a neighbor? Join community organizers and neighborhood volunteers? Suffer if necessary?

Do you already find yourself in a place of suffering? Know that God sees you, weeps with you, and will stay with you. Please reach out to the faithful, so they can join you in your suffering, too.

Rest

Our loving God, in your glory, may your name be praised.

May your Kingdom come, may your will be done, even here, though you may seem far away.

Give us each day what we need to sustain our life and our work.

Forgive us when we fail, and help us to call out, but allow for restoration of those who have failed us.

Guide us in ways that are consistent with your lovingkindness, lest we be tempted to be filled with hatred, and deliver us from being consumed.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen



About the Author

Mary Rodriguez provides case management and works in health advocacy. She lives in Chicago with her wife. The majestic beauty of creation is like a salve, and they are so grateful to live in a beautiful city by one of the world's Great Lakes.

I Shall Wear A Crown—It's Me, Lord!

A Reflection for Palm Sunday by Gillie D. Abdiraxman-Issa

Lectionary reading for 03/29/2026: *Liturgy of the Palms*: [Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11](#)
Liturgy of the Passion: [Isaiah 50:4-9a, Psalm 31:9-16, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 26:14-27:66](#)
or [Matthew 27:11-54](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 46:10; Matthew 21:6-11 and Matthew 27:11-46

Read

Isaiah 46:10

I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, 'My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please.'

Matthew 21:6-11

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. **8** A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna^[b] to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"^[c]

"Hosanna^[d] in the highest heaven!"

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

11 The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Matthew 27:11-46

Jesus before Pilate vs 27:11-14, 22-23

11 Now Jesus stood before [Pilate] the governor, and the governor asked Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" [In affirmation] Jesus said to him, "*It is as you say.*" **12** But when the charges were brought against Him by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. **13** Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they are testifying against You?" **14** But Jesus did not reply to him, not even to a single accusation, so that the governor was greatly astonished.

22 Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all replied, “Let Him be crucified!” 23 And he said, “Why, what has He done that is evil?” But they continued shouting all the louder, “Let Him be crucified!”

Jesus Is Mocked vs 27:27-31

27 Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and they gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on Him [as a king’s robe]. 29 And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and put a reed in His right hand [as a scepter]. Kneeling before Him, they ridiculed Him, saying, “Hail (rejoice), King of the Jews!” 30 They spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him *repeatedly* on the head. 31 After they finished ridiculing Him, they stripped Him of the *scarlet* robe and put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

The Crucifixion vs 35-37, 41-46

35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided His clothes among them by casting lots. 36 Then, sitting down there, they *began* to keep watch over Him [to guard against any rescue attempt]. 37 And above His head they put the accusation against Him which read, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

In the same way, the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, 42 “He saved others [from death]; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him *and* acknowledge Him. 43 He trusts in God; let God rescue *Him* now, if He delights in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44 The robbers who had been crucified with Him also began to insult Him in the same way.

45 Now from the sixth hour (noon) there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud [agonized] voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Reflection

Being sure is a valley—lonely, heavy, isolating. Being human is a balance—holding emotions and perspectives in tension.

Imagine listening to the governor or judge of that time—like Pontius Pilate—question your identity, all the while knowing full well the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10).

That took what you and I would call patience or humility. I ponder if our Lord would call it self-control.

God shows us in Scripture how we are to be still and know. As I read the Gospels, I see Jesus teaching in parables. Yet, in Matthew 27:11, I hear Him simply affirming Pilate: “It is as you say.” I understand Jesus’ silence before His accusers. Yet because He was human like us, I wonder if He was silently crying out to God:

- Don't you see this?
- Can you hear the voices, the ridicule, and the slander?
- I am only doing what is good and lovely and honorable.
- Why the persecution?
- Why have you forsaken me?

Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter and the start of Holy Week for Christians, is a feast day commemorating Jesus's entry into Jerusalem. We must remember, naturally, that when one is scheduled to die, their life and memories can play back like a tape. I can imagine how Jesus, even as a baby, already knew that He was going to conquer death, life, and the sins of the world.

As palms were laid at His feet along the path, in His last hours, people spat on Him, shouted for His death, hurled horrible accusations at Him, and He experienced excruciating pain and mockery. All because He loved us and came to defeat the sins of this world, death, and the devil. We, the humans of that time and even today, make a mockery of Him and all He endured for our good.

As we remember Palm Sunday, think about laying your sins at His feet with intention. Think about laying down evil thoughts and unforgiveness, too. Now, close your eyes and imagine yourself there, gazing at the image of Jesus that your consciousness agrees with.

- Is Jesus a baby—innocent, precious, with a warm, friendly smile that soothes your nervous system?
- Is Jesus a brother figure you can depend on, who protects you and hangs out with you?
- Is Jesus the face of a confidant and friend who knows every deep, dark secret, but would flip a table over if someone tried to harm your name?

Even if you're reading this and none of those visuals register, He came so you can have life and have it abundantly. He loves you, and He wants you to know that. Choose Him. Ask Him to come into your heart and make you new, so that when you think of Him again, you will feel His everlasting love and embrace.

Respond

On Palm Sunday, churches often distribute palm fronds to congregants, who may wave them during the service or bring them home as a symbol of peace and victory. But what if you don't have one, or you're at someone else's home and there are no palms around? Whether you receive a palm, see one in the hands or homes of others, or are not physically able to obtain one, you can still participate. Take a piece of fabric, a cloth, or anything you can lift, and wave it in the air with power, strength, and belief. Then declare: "Jehovah Nissi—Lord, you are my banner. You are my symbol of spiritual and physical victory."

Rest

Lord, you conquered the grave.

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

You are my hiding place.

You are my deliverer whenever I'm afraid.

You said in your word...Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

I will trust in you. In Jesus name, Amen.

About the Author



Gillie Abdiraxman-Issa is a trained Spiritual Director who walks alongside women through life transitions and mental health challenges, helping them listen for God's voice and respond with courage and clarity. She also works with families to strengthen relationships and communication, tending to the places where love and language have gotten tangled. A Life and Business Advisor, Gillie draws on her spiritual direction training to help people move toward the lives they aspire to build. She will soon add Licensed

Professional Counselor to her work after August of this year, deepening the clinical care she offers in sacred, everyday spaces. She enjoys traveling, laughing at comedy specials, taking nature walks, and cooking. She has been married to her hubby, T'Chaka, for 20 years, and they enjoy a full life with their four sons. **Follow Gillie on Substack and on IG@gillieissa**

Our Artisan God

A Reflection for Monday, March 30 by Reverend Charlene Rotvold

Lectionary reading for 03/20/2026: [Isaiah 42:1-9](#); [Psalm 36:5-11](#); [Hebrews 9:11-15](#); [John 12:1-11](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 36:5-11

Read

Psalm 36:5-11

⁵Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.

⁶Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.

You care for people and animals alike, O LORD.

⁷ How precious is your unfailing love, O God!

All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.

⁸You feed them from the abundance of your own house,
letting them drink from your river of delights.

⁹For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see.

¹⁰Pour out your unfailing love on those who love you;
give justice to those with honest hearts.

¹¹Don't let the proud trample me or the wicked push me around.

Reflect

Music has long been a key venue where I meet with God. Learning His character, praising His name, and praying in the night are light and joyful tasks when put to music. Songs I learned as a child still come to mind, *often*, as I go about my day, and I'm grateful to carry His Word with me in such beautiful and creative ways.

Such is my response to Psalm 36. With a smile on my face I can hear the musicians play, and I find myself humming along (or singing out loud) as I read this passage.

Your love, oh Lord

Reaches to the heavens

Your faithfulness stretches to the sky

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains

Your justice flows like the ocean's tide.

So goes the opening line of *Your Love O Lord*, by Third Day, mirroring verses 5 and 6. From the Psalmist's reed pen to the poet's mind to the musical arc to my welcoming heart.

God's Word provides a limitless abundance of lyrics just waiting for a tune, longing to be captured by poets and artists, inviting us to worship and remember with instrument or voice. I wonder how many songs have been written using God's Word as lyrical text or inspiration. Wouldn't that be an amazing research project? I love that our God is a God of music, devoting an entire book of Scripture to songs. Oh how I long to sing the Psalms as they were written to be sung. Can you even imagine? But the words, written or sung, aren't meant to be the end. They are *means* to an end, words meant to draw us to the Living Word. To the unfailing love of our God. To God's faithfulness, righteousness, and justice, all of which extend beyond what our senses can hold. We are reminded that our God cares for us (*and for my sweet puppy, v. 6*) and offers us the most intimate of shelters. He is food and drink, life and light, and He notices and values the raw honesty we bring to His loving presence. He is indeed:

*Worthy of every song we could ever sing
Worthy of all the praise we could ever bring
Worthy of every breath we could ever breathe
We live for You, oh, we live for You.*

Build My Life, by Pat Barrett

Respond

Each Lenten season we're invited to consider something new to reflect on as we respond to God's love for us, dust though we are - a word or thought or book or practice intended to draw us nearer to the presence of God. New may sound like silence. New may taste like fasting. New may act like time or sacrifice or prayer. And sometimes what is new involves the arts: music, painting, poetry, story. W. Phillip Keller, in his thoughtful little book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, refers to God the Son as God the artisan, the artist, who brought into being all that had been formulated in His Father's mind (p. 16). What a lovely image this is. While the Word of God certainly stands alone and is able to affect us deeply all by itself, my heart sometimes needs the work of an artisan to move me "further up and further in" (from *The Last Battle*, by C.S. Lewis).

In the case of today's text, a song does just that. My prayer is that God as artisan will lead you to connect with and live with His Word in fresh ways this Lenten season, and beyond.

Rest

Father God, author of all that exists, Lord Jesus, artisan and bringer into being, Holy Spirit, agent who brings understanding, you are everything. Food and drink, life and light and life, love and faithfulness, justice and righteousness. Draw us nearer to you in creative and unexpected ways. Surprise us with your goodness, your nearness, yourself. Amen.

About the Author



Char serves as the Care & Connect Pastor at Faith Covenant Church in Burnsville, MN. She's married to Kirk, mom to Kyle & Erika, and mom-in-law to Emma. Aside from pastoring, Char is a trained coach and spiritual director within the ECC. In her free time, she's often found with her nose in a book, outside running or cross country skiing, camping in the BWCA, or enjoying time with her family and friends.

Where is the Wise Person?

A Reflection for Tuesday, March 31 by Melanie Myatt

Lectionary reading for 03/31/2026 [Isaiah 49:1-7](#); [Psalm 71:1-14](#); [1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#); [John 12:20-36](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Read

1 Corinthians 1.18-31 *New Testament for Everyone*

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the debater of this present age? Don't you see that God has turned the world's wisdom into folly? 21 This is how it's happened: in God's wisdom, the world didn't know God through wisdom, so it gave God pleasure, through the folly of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 Jews look for signs, you see, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we announce the crucified Messiah, a scandal to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, the Messiah—God's power and God's wisdom. 25 God's folly is wiser than humans, you see, and God's weakness is stronger than humans.

26 Think back to your own call, my brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise in human terms. Not many of you were powerful. Not many were nobly born. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose the insignificant and despised things of the world—yes, even things that don't exist!—to abolish the power of the things that do exist, 29 so that no creature could boast in God's presence. 30 Who and what you now are is a gift from God in Messiah Jesus, who has become for us God's wisdom—and righteousness, sanctification and redemption as well; 31 so that, as the Bible puts it, "Anyone who boasts should boast in the Lord."

Reflect

This may be a funny thing to admit as a chaplain, but I feel a little embarrassed about being a person of faith. When people ask what I do for a job, I tell them, but I feel like I immediately have to qualify what I do. I feel like I have to point and say, "I'm not like *them*." (Also, you wouldn't believe how many people will immediately find a reason to swear after I tell them what I do.) Also, a lot of my job involves explaining to people that we don't have to limit ourselves to talking only about faith, religion, or spirituality. In fact, very little of my job involves doing that, but I *can* talk about it if that is what you want to talk about.

When I read this passage from Paul, I wonder how many of us identify with his observations about the gospel message today. For the Gentiles, Paul recognizes that the gospel sounds

ridiculous. For people who prided themselves on being intellectually and culturally elite, the message of a person who was crucified by the Romans, who was raised from the dead, and who now was the ruler of the world while asking people to join his movement with faithful obedience sounded...absurd.

I feel the same way. But not, like Paul, because no one has ever heard the ridiculous message, but because too many people have heard it, and probably heard it manipulated and twisted in such a way that now no matter how you try to phrase it, people think it is ridiculous. Not only that, but people know so much about *all* religions that trying to tell people Christianity is different, that Christianity has something else to offer rings flat.

When Paul preached to the Jews, on the other hand, he felt like the gospel message was scandalous. A “scandal” in Paul’s day was something that trips you up. I relate to this as well. Trying to explain to Christians that Jesus came not to demonstrate his power by overthrowing authorities and dominions was scandalous to the Jews and feels almost equally scandalous today. Jesus came to establish a kingdom “in which the weak and the foolish find themselves just as welcome as the strong and the wise, if not more so (NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 13). This is not a popular message in our current culture and climate.

What do we do with this tension? I think we follow Paul’s advice, something I imagine he must have gone back to again and again...and again himself: “Think back to your own call.”

Think back to your own call. What is it that keeps you coming back to God our Father, Jesus our Savior, Spirit our comforter? What drew you to faith in this ridiculous and scandalous religion in the first place? As Jesus reminds [the church in Ephesus, remember your first love.](#)

When we ground ourselves in our first love, when we remember our own call to faith, we find the foundation of truth that is stronger than any foolishness masquerading as wisdom, any weakness masquerading as power that fills our social media feeds or makes headlines today.

Respond

Spend some time today reflecting on your own call to faith. If you have an opportunity, tell someone your story today, just so you can rehear and remember for yourself. Consider “the love you showed at the beginning,” and think of one thing you can do today that is reflective of the love you had at the beginning.

Rest

Today, receive Paul's prayer for your own wisdom, hope, and faith, more powerful than anything else in our world today: "I pray that the God of Messiah Jesus our Lord, the father of glory, would give you, in your spirit, the gift of being wise, of seeing things people can't normally see, because you are coming to know him and to have the eyes of your inmost self opened to God's light. Then you will know exactly what the hope is that goes with God's call; you will know the wealth of the glory of his inheritance in his holy people; and you will know the outstanding greatness of his power towards us who are loyal to him in faith, according to the working of his strength and power." [Ephesians 1.15-19](#)

About the Author



Melanie Myatt is a spiritual director, writer, hospice chaplain and mom of four. When she isn't doing any of those things, you can probably find her curled up on the couch with a delicious novel and a belletristic snack. You can find more of Melanie's writing on [Substack](#).

Drop the Baggage & Run Your Race!

A Reflection for Wednesday, April 1st by Jonalisa Worlitz

Lectionary reading for April 1, 2026: link from spreadsheet i.e. [Isaiah 50:4-9a](#), [Psalm 70](#), [Hebrews 12:1-3](#), [John 13:21-32](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Hebrews 12:1-3

Read

Hebrews 12:1-3 Common English Bible (CEB)

12 So then, with endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, **2** and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne.**3** Think about the one who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won't be discouraged and you won't give up.



Reflect

I remember running my first 10K years ago in Los Angeles' Chinatown with a close friend. I hadn't trained as much as I should have, but I felt good about finishing the race. My friend had been very consistent with her training schedule, running several times every week. At the start, she insisted on staying with me and running at my pace, but I encouraged her to go ahead and run her best race.

As I ran on my own, something clicked: I needed to run my own race at my own pace. Not hers. Not anyone else's. Just mine. That moment has stayed with me not just for running but for life.

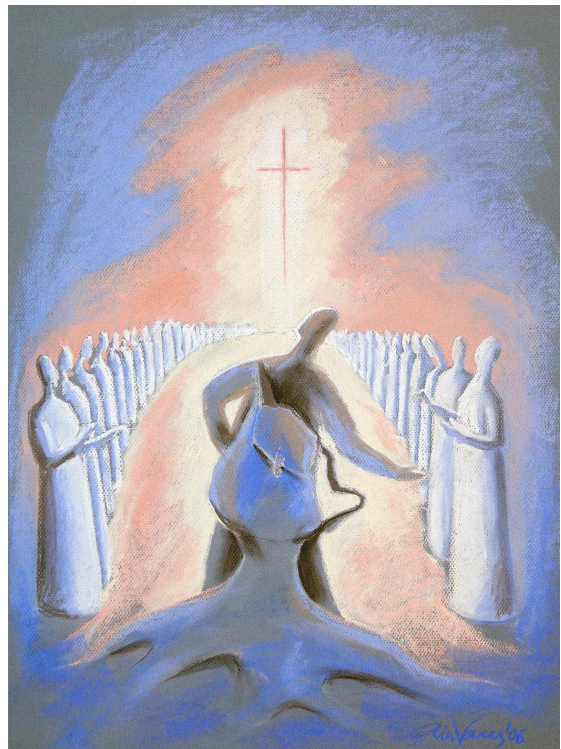
Each of us has a unique life story, with different experiences, gifts, and callings. Because of this uniqueness, comparing ourselves to anyone is unhelpful in most situations. When I think back to my 10K, I realize: if I had tried to keep up with my friend, I would have been exhausted and pushed my body past its limits. I definitely wouldn't have enjoyed the race as much. If she had stayed with me, she wouldn't have run to her full potential. She would've been holding back to accommodate me. We both needed to run our own race. The same is true in our walk with God.

Community is such a vital part of our lives as believers but we are also on very unique individual journeys where we are called to run the race God has laid out for us. My friend and I ran at different paces and had different experiences but both finished the race and celebrated together in the end.

Hebrews 12:1–3 uses the metaphor of a race to describe a life of faith. Just before this, in Hebrews 11, the writer presents a faith “hall of fame” highlighting Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Noah, Rahab, and others. Then the focus shifts to us, saying now it’s our turn to run the race God has laid out for us. These men and women were far from perfect. Their faith was tested, stretched, and refined through trials, long seasons of waiting, and deep uncertainty. Many did not even see the fullness of what God had promised in their lifetime. Yet they endured and we are called to do the same.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to “throw off any extra baggage and get rid of the sin that trips us up.” We are to let go of anything that weighs us down and hinders us whether it’s sin, fear, doubt, comparison, old wounds, shame, or any other burdens we are carrying so we can run our best race. Sin wraps itself around our feet and trips us up. You can’t run freely while holding onto unnecessary weight or tripping over sin.

There may be moments in your race when you feel strong and confident, thinking, “I got this,” and other moments when you wonder, “Do I have what it takes to keep going?” Life comes in seasons and some seasons require more endurance than others. This passage doesn’t just tell us to push through but reminds us that we can draw strength from the great cloud of witnesses that came before us and by fixing our eyes on Jesus. In a world full of distractions, staying in the Word and keeping our eyes on the Lord is a daily battle but intimacy with God is worth fighting for.



Jesus is our greatest example of a life of faith. Many versions of Hebrews 12:2 say, “For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross.” He did not quit when it got hard. He endured unimaginable pain and humiliation knowing that the reward would far outweigh the temporary suffering. Because of His perseverance, we have salvation, eternal life, and a source of strength for our own life. Jesus completed his assignment from the and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God eternally. Finishing well requires that we understand our assignment and are faithful to complete it.

Hebrews 12:3 reminds us to remember the opposition Jesus endured from sinners so that we don’t get discouraged and give up. A life of faith is not easy. It requires perseverance through

trials and pain, trust in the unseen, and a willingness to keep going even when the finish line feels far away.

Run the unique race God has laid out for you, enduring the unique challenges you will face for the joy set before you, knowing that the Lord will be with you every step of the way.

Respond

Pray and Listen:

Lord, what am I holding onto that you never asked me to carry? Is there any weight or sin keeping me from running freely? Commit to releasing those things that are weighing you down, repent of sin, and keep your eyes on Jesus.

OR

Lord, would you give me a glimpse (a word, an image, a scripture) of the joy set before me that makes enduring worthwhile?

Rest

God, we praise you and thank you for the life you have given us, the race you have laid out for each of us. Help us to understand our assignment and release any baggage we're carrying. Free us from sin. Give us the strength and comfort we need when life feels unbearable. Heal any wounds that are hindering us and help us to focus our eyes on you so that we can run our race with freedom and joy. Remind us that you are running with us every step of the way. We love you. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

About the Author



Jonalisa Worlitz is a leader who is passionate about prayer, discernment, and helping others build healthy, fulfilling, lives. She is also a passionate advocate for youth in the foster care system and those at-risk for incarceration. She holds an M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy and an M.A. in Theology and Ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary, as well as a B.A. in Social Work from San Francisco State University. She and her husband Harvey are both from Los Angeles, California but have lived in Atlanta for the last 5 years. They enjoy traveling and eating good food in their free time.

Art. <https://bible.art/p/Kwxy3jgB3SymSsYm8dBU>, and "Let Us Throw off Everything that Hinders" - Original Prophetic Painting by Estonian artist Ain Vares
<https://ainvaresart.com/products/original-prophetic-painting-let-us-throw-off-everything-that-hinders-hebrews-12>

You will later understand!

A Reflection for Maundy Thursday by Rev. Dr. Cynthia P. Stewart

Lectionary Readings: [Psalm 116 and John 13](#)

Selected passage for today's reflection: Psalm 116

Read

Psalm 116

- ¹ I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.
- ² Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.
- ³ The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came over me;
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.
- ⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord:
“Lord, save me!”
- ⁵ The Lord is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.
- ⁶ The Lord protects the unwary;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
- ⁷ Return to your rest, my soul,
for the Lord has been good to you.
- ⁸ For you, Lord, have delivered me from
death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling,
- ⁹ that I may walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.
- ¹⁰ I trusted in the Lord when I said,
“I am greatly afflicted”;
- ¹¹ in my alarm I said,
“Everyone is a liar.”
- ¹² What shall I return to the Lord
for all his goodness to me?
- ¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.
- ¹⁴ I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.
- ¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his faithful servants.
- ¹⁶ Truly I am your servant, Lord;
I serve you just as my mother did;
you have freed me from my chains.
- ¹⁷ I will sacrifice a thank offering to you
and call on the name of the Lord.
- ¹⁸ I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people,
- ¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the Lord—
in your midst, Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord.^[a]

Reflection

We are in what is called the Holy Triduum (Three Days) as Lent is ending while many have fasted, prayed, meditated, came into close relationship with God and we are at the final stretch. Today is called Maudy Thursday or Holy Thursday depending on your tradition. Growing up and into my adulthood, Holy Thursday was always one of my favorite days during Holy Week. I was always fascinated by John 13 coming to life as I witnessed my Pastor walk around with a towel on his arm and a basin of water washing the feet of those he had chosen to represent the disciples. It reminded me that no matter what is going on in a person's life, we are called to be ministers of the towel. Well, in April 2000, my view of Maudy Thursday hit differently.

I had a doctor's appointment the day before, which only took an hour, made it back home and I felt fine. About three hours later, that changed. I immediately began to bleed and feel unbearable cramps. I was home alone and I had to call my then husband at the time to let him know what was going on. By the time he had gotten home, the pain had increased, called my doctor and was informed to wait until the next morning. Enduring the pain throughout the night, I went to the doctor's office early that morning (Holy Thursday) and was informed the baby did not have a heartbeat. The doctor informed me, "let God continue to do what has started." She knew I had a strong faith in God, but at that moment, I wondered why I was suffering through this. I was released to go home with some medication. But God was not finished. About five hours later, still in pain and bleeding, I went to the bathroom and delivered my baby. I was 4 months pregnant. I called the doctor again and told her what had happened, but by this time the clinic was closed, so I was informed to come back again the next morning. Three days (triduum) of pain and anguish during Holy Week.

But now 26 years later, I understand. It is John 13:7, which Jesus states to Simon Peter before washing his feet, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Psalms 116 has always been a scripture that brought me comfort. I know that when I cry out to God, He hears my voice and turns His ear towards me. After losing my son Samson, I felt verses 3-4, when suicidal thoughts came to my mind and questions still felt unanswered. But verses 5-19 gave me hope. God saved my life and delivered me from death. Through the pain I endured, God has opened the door for me to minister to other women.

So, what is your cry to God?

Respond

Read through Psalm 116 again, then with your journal/laptop/tablet write your own version of Psalm 116. Let God take over the pen or keyboard as you write from your heart. Now, read John 13 and consider the life of Jesus and what he sacrificed as Lent ends. What will the next three days -- Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Resurrection Sunday bring for you?

Rest

God, I lift every woman who has lost a child, whether it was a miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death, or a child they raised and then lost. God, as you hear their cry, bring them comfort and peace as they remember. Even for those reflecting today who may not have lost a child, but are dealing with something else during this Lenten season, may you touch their hearts, bring wisdom, protection, and guidance. May we end this Lenten season feeling closer to you and knowing you are omnipresent. In Jesus Name, Amen

About the author



Rev. Dr. Cyntia P. Stewart is a minister at New Life Covenant Church Southeast in Chicago, IL. She has been leading a women's 5 am prayer call each Wednesday since 2018. She works at Illinois Institute of Technology and is adjunct faculty at Loyola University Chicago. She has a passion for seeing the healing power of God manifest in people's lives.

My God, hear my cry

A Reflection for Good Friday by Rev. Natasha Westerhoud

Lectionary reading for Friday, April 03, 2026: [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#) [Psalm 22](#) [Hebrews 10:16-25](#)
or [Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9](#) [John 18:1-19:42](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 22:1-2

Read

Psalm 22

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
- ² Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.

Reflect

Psalm 22 does not begin with calm faith but with a cry that is familiar and echoes through the ages: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** These powerful words express a deep sense of grief that can leave us feeling confused, isolated, and overwhelmed. On Good Friday, Jesus embraces this Psalm as his own, connecting with everyone whose pain has ever felt like abandonment, reminding us that we are never truly alone in our struggles.

I have often found myself crying out in desperation, “Where are you, God? Why don’t you take this away from me? I am left to feel angry, lonely, and scared. I try to find my way back, yet things seem impossible. Today I am reminded once again of the truth in Psalm 22: it does not dismiss pain; it dignifies it, giving voice to suffering that cannot be neatly packaged or soothed by promises of goodness. Some losses shake the soul so deeply that even God can seem impossibly distant. Have you ever had that moment when you cannot see, hear, or feel God? Have you ever fallen on your knees in utter despair, saying these words, **“I cry by day, but you do not answer.”** I have. The day my father passed away. The day we lost our child. The day I was rejected by friends. The day I received the devastating diagnosis. The day I felt unheard or unseen in spaces I thought were safe. The day I started to notice my child’s hidden suffering. I felt so abandoned that I could not bear to face another day. Deeply mourning a life that should have been, that I felt like my heart would rip out of my chest. Sometimes grief takes up all the space around you, and sometimes faith feels like shattered glass, and silence feels unbearable. If you find yourself in such a season, your experience is not that you lack faith; what you are feeling is human suffering and mourning. Something we try to avoid, yet most have lived it.

Yet today, on this dark day, I am reminded of hope. There is always hope. As we read Psalm 22, we see that the Psalm continues to speak to us. In our despair and isolation, we are drawn to the truth, catching a glimpse of how to connect our pain-filled hearts to the One who feels

distant. And here lies the invitation to trust as we cry out in hopes of being seen and heard. We all have this deep desire to be seen and understood.

And at this point, we are mindful and connect with the truth that we are in a relationship with the one who is holy, good, and faithful. He has never failed us, and we can trust Him. We remember His goodness. **“Yet you are holy... In you, our ancestors trusted.”** The devastating pain continues, and somehow our eyes are open to recognize that we are invited to re-remember the One who can offer us healing and peace. I have always believed that joy and suffering coexist, and it is in this coexistence that we need to learn how to live in hope, holding space for both. And as we understand this coexisting relationship, we see that He is near; indeed, **“You who fear the Lord, praise him... For he did not hide his face from the one who suffers.”** The pain is still there, but something is different about it. We are not alone in it, and we remember that God does not hide His face from the one who suffers, and He is indeed present in the hidden dark silence, holding us close, experiencing the co-existence of joy and suffering.

On Good Friday, Jesus speaks from the cross as He fully experiences human grief, abandonment, and the deepest shadows of the human heart. Because He entered that darkness, He understands the intensity of our own sorrow and pain, as there is no depth of suffering He has not already faced and understood. He IS there. His suffering and death call us into a life of freedom and redemption, embracing both joy and suffering.

Respond

May this Psalm bring comfort in your grief. Allow yourself to cry out, knowing you will find strength and hope even in the darkest moments. May you believe and trust that Jesus understands your suffering and will not abandon you in your time of despair. I invite you to take a moment to be still and breathe in slowly, recognizing any heaviness you may be carrying. As you breathe out, breathe out this truth.” I praise you, Lord, you do not hide your face from the one who suffers. *“Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for the Cross.*

Rest

Creator in Heaven, you know my heart and know my needs. I offer all that I am to you. In my brokenness, I praise you, as I know the truth. You love me, you died for me, and you will never leave me or abandon me. The world may fail me, but you will never fail me. On this dark day, I pause to question, wonder and mourn in my own weakness, yet I do not stay there, because I know that You did not leave me, and I know that Sunday IS coming. Praise the Lord, all who fear Him, Amen.

About the Author



Reverend Natasha Westerhoud follows Jesus' teachings by living with love, compassion, generosity, and radical hospitality. As an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada, she serves as a Chaplain, caring for residents and families. Deeply passionate about pastoral care, she founded Soul Care Ministries, offering inspiring workshops and mental health support worldwide. She is also a trauma and attachment counsellor, currently studying for a degree in Spiritual Care. Natasha leads annual mission trips through the ECCC, including family trips to Quito, Ecuador. Married to Mike for 30 years, they have two beautiful children, Hana and Eli, after a long journey of waiting and crossing oceans to adopt. She openly shared her adoption stories in 'The Mom Quilt,' with proceeds supporting The Mercy House in Kenya, helping pregnant girls in need. The book is available on Amazon.

Sitting With Grief

A Reflection for Holy Saturday by Ellie VerGowe Highlands

Lectionary Reading for 04/04/2026: [Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24, Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16, 1 Peter 4:1-8, Matthew 27:57-66](#)

Selected Passages for Reflection: Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24 and Matthew 27:57-66

Read

Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

I am one who has seen affliction
under the rod of God's wrath;
he has driven and brought me
into darkness without any light;
against me alone he turns his hand,
again and again, all day long.
He has made my flesh and my skin waste
away;
he has broken my bones;
he has besieged and enveloped me
with bitterness and tribulation;
he has made me sit in darkness
like the dead of long ago.
He has walled me about so that I cannot
escape;
he has put heavy chains on me;
though I call and cry for help,

he shuts out my prayer;
he has blocked my ways with hewn stones;
he has made my paths crooked.
The thought of my affliction and my
homelessness
is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the Lord never
ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."

Matthew 27:57-66

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 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. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore, command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise, his disciples may go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can. So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Reflect

These texts are ours, aren't they? We, too, have felt like we are under the rod of God's wrath. We too, feel besieged and enveloped with bitterness and tribulation. We, too have lost loved ones and put them in the ground. We know in our bones the feeling of this abandonment and the ache of this grief.

This is holy Saturday. It would be easier (at first) to avoid the pain of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and move on quickly to the celebration of Easter Sunday. But one thing I know, as a chaplain and a griever, is that we cannot avoid difficult feelings or skip the grief. Today is the day we remember that the disciples put their friend in the ground after watching him die an awful death. We remember that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary vigiled with Jesus through the unfolding trauma, and they kept watch over his body.

We remember for Jesus and his loved ones, but we also remember for us. How often in religious spaces do we actually get to sit with our grief without being forced to move prematurely on to Christ's victory over death? Holy Saturday is an invitation to let ourselves grieve, to feel whatever we feel about God, even if we feel God has abandoned us. Anyone who grieves will tell you that grief isn't something that you get over or move through quickly. Grief is not linear. It can be loud, it makes others feel uncomfortable, and it can feel like being split in two. Grief is not a problem to fix... it simply IS, after all we have weathered. It doesn't leave us, and sometimes it becomes a companion that needs to be listened to.

The only way to the hope of the resurrection is *through* suffering and through grief. And the writer of Lamentations, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, our Savior Jesus, and so many other ancestors of our faith show us how. They express grief. They voice their feelings of abandonment by God. Their grief is witnessed, and they witness each other's grief. They weep and wail, and they move their bodies, rending their clothes. We know now that if we avoid our grief and sadness and refuse to express our gripes with God, those feelings stay in our bodies and we get stuck. The grief may manifest itself sideways in anxiety, exhaustion, inability to feel even the good feelings, and it might even make us feel physical pain. If we refuse to connect with our grief, we may find ourselves also disconnected from others, from God, and even from ourselves.

So today of all days, you are invited to sit in Holy Saturday where your suffering, loss, and grief are not all wrapped up in a bow. You are invited to stay with yourself as you hurt. The wildness of your grief does not make you weak. It simply means that you are human and that you have loved. You deserve space to feel what needs to be felt, to let that move through your body (however long that takes!), and to thrive. Letting yourself feel even the "negative" things and sit in the grief is the path to resurrection, both in the gospels and in our lives. It is only in sitting with our grief and blessing others as they sit in theirs for as long as it takes that we move forward with hope.

Respond

Take a moment to sit alone or with someone else you love and trust. Place your hand on your heart and take a few breaths. You are invited to feel your hard feelings. What are you grieving today? What is your grief telling you? How might you gather the courage to stay with your grief? Show hospitality to whatever comes. If a wail builds up in your throat, let it free. If tears fall, let them. If words come, say them. If you need to move your body, move your body. If sitting in the stillness and desolation quietly feels right, do that. May you be witnessed by yourself, someone you trust, and certainly by God. You have loved, and you are loved. When you are finished today (for the need to express will come again!), go tell someone and receive some care. Today, you join with the ancestors of our faith as they waited at the tomb.

Rest

Loving God who grieved, suffered, and died, give me courage to sit with grief, suffering, and death too. Attend to me now as I feel abandoned, besieged, and enveloped by bitterness and tribulation. Wrap me in your arms, hold me close, and bless the tender and hurting places within me. Amen.

About the Author

Ellie VerGowe Highlands is an ICU and oncology hospital chaplain in Seattle, WA where she was born and raised. Ellie is married to Aaron, and together they have a wildly loving dog named Fiona. When she isn't at the hospital, Ellie is singing, reading, writing poetry, gardening, hiking, and always practicing wonder and awe in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. These practices help her find strength and hope in the collective work of making a world where all people can thrive.



Who Tells Your Story?

A Reflection for Easter Sunday, by Rev. Madison J. McAleese

Lectionary Reading for 4/5/2026: [Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10](#)

Selected Passage: John 20:1-18

Read

John 20:1-18

The Empty Tomb

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. **2** So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. **4** Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, **7** as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. **8** Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. **9** (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) **10** Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb **12** and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” **14** At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

17 Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Reflect

Easter is the most important holiday in the Christian faith, because it is the day that Jesus defeated death, resisted the oppressive forces of Empire, and proved God’s reign by coming back to bodily life.

But a significant part of the story that we don’t always think about is the significance of Jesus revealing himself to Mary Magdalene. It is especially interesting, because the risen Christ didn’t actually need a messenger. He could have gone directly to his disciples from the get-go, revealing himself, and sharing his messaging of resurrection. He could have done the work himself.

But instead, he chose a messenger. A go-between. A vessel for his message. And it’s this precedent that we see throughout the Christian faith - God always chooses a messenger. From Moses, to John the Baptist, to Jesus, and then Mary Magdalene, and later to the disciples in the book of Acts, God works and speaks through his people.

God never wants to speak for himself. God wants us to tell his story. God wants us to co-create the New Heavens and New Earth with him, as partners, as vessels for his important healing work here on earth.

Jesus’s resurrection is not just a miracle of the body, but it is the first, inaugural step toward all of humanity sharing the good news.

And so, Easter reminds us not just of the glorious resurrection, but of the work of holy messengers. May we all be holy messengers.

Respond

Where can you serve as a messenger for God's message this week, either through deed or word?

What other holy people and prophets are inspiring to you? What can you learn about the stories they tell of God?

Rest

God of the most glorious resurrection, we thank you for defeating death. We thank you for Jesus's ministry on earth and in heaven. Fill us with your Spirit so that we may serve as your holy messengers, sharing the good news of justice, peace, liberation, and love. Let us co-create your Kingdom by doing your work. Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Madison Jones McAleese is a priest, social impact leader, and nonprofit executive director. She is an ordained priest through the Catholic Apostolic Church in North America and presides at her local Dignity Chapter. She has a Master's in Christian Studies and is completing her dissertation for her Doctorate in Social Transformation. Rev. Madison is also the Executive Director of FCM (Federation of Christian Ministries). She lives with her wife and dog, Bubbles, in Burbank, CA. You can find her at www.madisonjonesmcaleese.com.