

# Anointing

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## “Anointing”

In Hebrew the word that we translate as anointed means, literally, “oiled”. It is the word “Messiah”. The anointed one - the one whose coronation is an anointing with healing oil - is the one who comes to save and heal and redeem us. In the story of the woman who anoints Jesus feet with her tears, her kisses and her ointment (Luke 7:36-50) we discover that the recipients of Jesus’ anointing compassion also participate in anointing him. We bless the one who blesses us.

This twelfth annual collection of meditations on scripture is just such an act of giving and receiving the oil of anointing. Here you will discover the devotion of forty-seven disciples who have each hosted a single text from our sacred story. In anointing these texts with love and attention, with open ears and hearts we discover that the texts open us to the anointing power of the God who is present to us in Jesus Christ.

I invite you to join with the whole congregation of God’s people in the daily practice of seeing each of these forty-seven scriptures through the devotion of one of the saints in our midst. And I thank God for such a company of witnesses who testify to the power of God to anoint lives that are dried up with despair and worn out with fatigue. Amen.

blessings,  
Ed Searcy

**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**

**Ash Wednesday, February 17**

This is the word of the Lord that came to Joel. “Wake up you drunkards and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine...” We learn that the land has been laid waste, but the LORD promises that there is worse to come – “let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming”. God’s patience has run out and “a day of darkness and gloom” is close at hand. However, even in the face of such Old Testament blackness, Joel presents us with the Lenten message of repentance. “Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning... Who knows but that he may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing.” God has presented to us, not a promise, but rather, hope.

There is heavy lifting to be done in hope during Lent. Joel gives us God’s instructions for this work and at the center of it is the call to “Rend your heart and not your garments.” It seems to be clear that we must find the way to make sure that our turning to God is a real turning, a rending of the heart and not simply an outward show of repentance. This is what makes it so hard to obey God, for only a change of heart will be worthy of his compassion.

For me, responding to the gift of the opportunity to write this reflection marks an entry into the heavy lifting of Lent – a start on the path to this real turning of the heart to God. Even so, I fret about the incredible distance there seems to be on the route ahead. How far can any of us go in this endeavour? Will it ever be far enough? We can only strive in hope and in trust. “Who knows but that he may turn and have pity...”

*To you, O LORD, I call, for although a day of clouds and blackness is coming, you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Spare your people, O LORD and leave behind a blessing.*

Eric Hall

**Psalms 51:1-17**

**Thursday, February 18**

There are some who say that the time is now past for speaking about “sin.” It is too old-fashioned a word, designed to make people feel guilty – bad for self-esteem. “Why do you have to convince people they are ‘sinners’ before you can talk about the love of God?” they question.

For me, I did not have to be convinced I was a sinner. I knew who I was, how I felt, my strengths and my weaknesses. When I heard about “sin” I did not need convincing – I

recognized it as naming the very reality I knew deep down, deep down in me, deep down in the world.

There are other words we use today to try to talk about that reality: failure, loser, misguided, stupid, evil... or those popular ones I often hear, dysfunctional and toxic. Personally, I would rather be a “sinner” than “toxic”!

Psalms 51 was not written to convince anyone that they are a sinner. We don’t need convincing – we recognize ourselves. Whatever we have done, however we think about ourselves, we know the only way to be reconciled to God and others is for God to do the work; it is that deep, that imbedded, that intransigent. “Have mercy on me...” “blot out my transgressions ...” “cleanse me...” “teach me...” “purge me...” “wash me...” “create in me...” all asking that God do what I cannot do for myself, no matter how mature or strong or independent or powerful I am.

Our world is in a state where it cannot simply “progress.” Our lives are in a place where we cannot simply “improve.” We know it is not simply a matter of incremental change. A new life is needed. A new life must be created: “create in me a clean heart.”

Reread the Psalm again. If it does not ring true, do not try to force it – just move on.

But if it does sound all too close to home, do not despair. You are a sinner, like me, like so many others around and before you. And when you finally know yourself to be a sinner, you are on the brink of a new creation.

*Prayer*

*Psalm 51 is a prayer. Pick a phrase – pray it. Pick another and pray it, too. And if you are not sure where to start, start where I always start: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” Amen.*

Doug Goodwin

**2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10**

**Friday, February 19**

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see-- we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

### **Becoming the righteousness of God**

Paul in this letter encourages us to serve God in the ministry commended and exemplified by Christ. He reminds us that we are not alone in this daunting task. We count on Christ, who is a manifestation of the love and compassion of God on earth, to become in him “the righteousness of God.” And we also count on God who concedes us his grace. It is up to us to accept this grace, this connection with God that provides us with his much needed help for the ministry of making God a living presence in our lives and in other people’s lives.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” *Romans 8:31* It is God’s grace that provides us with “weapons of righteousness” to strengthen our spirit and to be able to endure suffering, ignorance, and hate with patience, comprehension, and love. Calamities, suffering and affliction are realities we face in our lives but with the grace of God, these realities will not find us powerless and turn us into victims. God’s grace gives us the spiritual strength that lets us understand what is beyond the realities of this world and that gets the best out of us even in the worst of circumstances.

*God, we ask you for wisdom and humility to accept your grace and fill our lives and spirits with your love and power so that when confronted with the difficulties of extending you ministry on earth we can find in your grace the resilience we need to continue the work you have commanded us to do. Amen.*

Richard

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

**Saturday, February 20**

These verses are set within the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus teaches about the kind of righteousness that characterizes the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus doesn’t instruct his followers to give, pray, and fast. He takes it for granted that faithful people will choose to do these disciplines that are important to a life of faith. But he warns against the kind of piety that is paraded for public show with an eye on the audience. What matters to Jesus is the motive. What matters is practicing our piety “in secret” simply for the love of God; “and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (vv. 4, 6, 18).

It seems Jesus is saying that God is secretly pleased with giving, prayer, and fasting when it is done not for any approval of others – even better, without their knowledge – but for God’s eyes only. God knows and sees and that is all that matters.

But is it possible to love God in a private way? Didn’t Jesus say earlier that we are his lights in the world? Are we not to act so that others may see our good works and give glory to [our] Father in heaven (5:14-16)? How do we deal with the seeming paradox between letting our light shine and doing these things in secret?

I think what Jesus is saying is that when we relate to our neighbour in giving alms (v.2), when we relate to God in prayer (v. 5), and when we relate to ourselves as people who know we are utterly dependent upon God by fasting (vv. 16-18), we do these things not to be seen and admired, but with a desire to worship and please only God, the audience of One.

This passage assures us that God sees us and blesses our genuine service and worship. Jesus encourages us to go about our devotion to God in word and deed, bearing witness to the Gospel in the world in whatever form that takes, as if no one else is watching. We need to try to get ourselves out of the way ... our selfish motivations and any kind of self-congratulation ... and let Jesus shine.

*God, we need a great deal of practice in learning to live for you, the audience of One. May all our acts of piety and sacrifice be made holy as we give it away for love of you. And may you reward us with your presence, grace, and blessing, which is what we want most of all.*

Sumarme

**Deuteronomy 26:1-11**

**Sunday, February 21**

When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving

you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, “Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.” When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make this response before the Lord your God: “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestor; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.” You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

I read that this passage and the subsequent passages establish two continuing liturgical events in the life of the Jewish people, namely presentation of first fruits (thanksgiving) and tithing. The passage included in this fragment of scripture is only about the thanksgiving rituals, the tithes are covered in the second half of the chapter. The passage provides a liturgy for the presentation of first fruits at the central sanctuary during a harvest pilgrimage festival (known as the festival of weeks) when the worshiper thanks God for the gift of the land and the generous harvest. It clearly ties together themes of deliverance, God’s gift of the fertile land, the importance of the central sanctuary, gifts due to the priests, and concern for the marginalized. It reviews Israel’s corporate experience of salvation, and then it moves to the worshiper’s personal story by tying the current gift of agricultural fertility to God’s past acts of deliverance.

So, what does it say to us today when we are so separated from the land, and from production of food for our families? Our food travels such a long distance to get to us – bananas and coffee from the tropics, and grains from the prairies sit alongside root vegetables from the Fraser Valley on dishes made in China. I have learned in the last few years about movements towards a 100-mile diet and other concepts to keep food seasonal and local but I produce and harvest almost nothing that I eat. This passage, however, is set in an agricultural time when the production of food was essential to basic survival. How to make this passage relevant to me and the others of our urban congregation? What if I sit back and think of the food as a metaphor for that which we produce? As a schoolteacher, what do I produce? Students who can answer questions well on a test? More optimistically, what if I result in encouraging students to think thoughtfully and compassionately? How then do I present these to God? Should my offering just be a portion of the money I earn? For now, I feel I can only offer a financial contribution, but I work constantly towards directing my response to God’s goodness in the work I do on a daily basis by treating my students with love.

When I ask myself about the liturgy we undertake for presentation of our offerings during U. Hill worship, I think of simple words in the midst of our worship service. I wonder about the role of thanksgiving in our daily lives (e.g., grace at meals, prayers of thanks, etc.), and realize that our family makes reasonable efforts to include thanksgiving in our daily routines. How does our congregation celebrate with all (including “Levites and the aliens who reside among us”) today? I know we celebrate with each other in our congregation when good things happen, along with mourning, offering sympathy, and helping when others are going through difficult times. I pray that we can continue our congregation’s work and ministry for many years to come – thanks be to God!

*Generous God,*

*We also are descendants of your wandering Jews. We thank you for the many fruits of our daily harvest – fruits of our hands and of our work in so many realms. We realize that we do not harvest food in the same way as in ancient times, but we still rejoice in your harvest in us each day. We pray that we may remember that you are the one who gives us the gifts of talent and treasure. Help us always to celebrate in the bounty you have granted us and to share it abundantly with our congregation and your world.*

*Barbara Fraser Tilley*

**Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16**

**Monday, February 22**

“A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” (vs. 7)

“Because you have made the Lord our refuge, no evil shall befall you.” (vs. 9-10)

“He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” (vs.11-12)

“Is this what you believe? If it is, I have some incredibly good news for you. You are wrong.” (Peterson, *A Long Obedience*, p. 37).

Wrong in our expectations of what faith will bring. This is not our experience. Too many bad things happen to us and to those we love and to good people of faith around us. Our experience does not seem to comply with the promises of the psalm. Even Jesus rejects the appearance of the promises of the psalm. When the devil quoted vs. 11-12, Jesus replied, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God!” (Matthew 4:5-7)

The life of faith does not exempt us from the difficulties of living. Shit happens, to people of faith as well as anyone else. The parents of the young soldier killed in Afghanistan are

not comforted by the fact that a thousand others were not killed. There are thousands in Haiti, the latest catastrophic “act of God,” who have been killed, buried alive, maimed, and even yet are without food or water or shelter. What does the psalm say to them?

It doesn’t jibe with our experience. Yet this psalm has comforted so many for so long, surely it is not just wishful thinking?

“The promise of the psalm . . . is not that we shall never stub our toes, but that no injury, no illness, no accident, no distress, will have evil power over us, that is, will be able to separate us from God’s purpose in us. . . . All the water in all the oceans cannot sink a ship unless it gets inside. Nor can all the trouble in the world harm us unless it gets inside us. That is the promise of the psalm. . . . None of the things that happen to you, none of the troubles you encounter, have any power to get between you and God, dilute his grace in you, divert his will from you.” (Peterson, p. 42-43)

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35-39)

*Give us, our God, such trust in your grace that we may always abide in the shadow of the Almighty, you our refuge and fortress, and know that nothing, nothing, can separate us from your love. Amen*

Alan Reynolds

## **Romans 10:8b-13**

**Tuesday, February 23**

### **Jesus**

The Gideons really have to stop doing it. Handing out copies of just the New Testament that is. It has been said that we can not begin to grasp what the New Testament is proclaiming without being familiar with the first, larger part of the Bible – what was the scriptures for both Jesus and Paul. That is very true of this text from Paul’s letter to the church in Rome. Within 5 ½ verses Paul has included three quotes from the Old Testament, starting with the one he is playing a riff on: Deuteronomy 30:14.

Deuteronomy is written as the final speech of Moses given to the Israelites before they enter the promised land. Found nearing the end, chapter 30 is the concluding piece that has outlined the covenant blessings and curses (yes, curses) in their relationship

with Yahweh. If the covenant is kept, the people will be blessed. If it is not kept, curses will be incurred. Since the fall of Jerusalem by the Babylonians up to and including the time in which Paul writes (a period of over 400 years), Israel has been ruled by foreigners and it is generally understood that the people are living under the covenant curses. There is hope and promise, however, in the 30<sup>th</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy. Here it states that Yahweh will not leave them in this state but will provide a way for the covenant relationship to be kept. Paul here in Romans is proclaiming that finally, in Jesus of Nazareth, that way has been provided – and, mind-blowingly, it is for all people. God has kept God’s promise and accomplished it in an unexpected and barrier exploding way.

*If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord  
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,  
you will be saved. ~Romans 10: 9*

There is no vagueness here. There is no getting around it, under it or over it. It is there in all its historical particularity. Jesus is The Way now to covenant relationship with Yahweh.

Confessing that “Jesus is Lord” was and is part of our baptism. In Paul’s time, this is meant to be set directly over against the statement of one of Caesar’s titles: “Caesar is Lord”. As we confess today “Jesus is Lord” what, in turn, are we confessing is *not* Lord in our life: money, over consumption, our busy accomplishments, our reliance on weapons for security? There are many modern idols to take the place of Caesar.

Biblically understood, “heart” refers to the centre of the human person. It is not just the emotions, but also the mind – the will. The statement, therefore, “believe in your heart” is all encompassing of who we are, what we see as true and from that, how we live our lives. “That God raised Jesus from the dead.” is what Paul is proclaiming must be believed in this way. Even here in Lent, we reflect upon resurrection. For Jesus’ resurrection was completely unexpected and is completely significant. It means that not even death can stop God accomplishing God’s purposes. It means our bodies matter. They are not just shells housing souls (and if my body matters, so does yours, and so does everyone else’s). It means it is this Creation that God means to redeem.

Saved. Pulled from the rubble saved. A firm rock to jump onto in the middle of a flash flood saved (note all those references in the Bible to God as our Rock). This is all good news. Salvation is established, not to be undone (though it can be refused) and it leads to transformation in all aspects of our life. This engenders an attitude of humility and great gratitude (what it does not and should not ever engender is arrogance for arrogance is not of Christ; as Paul elsewhere advocates, if we are to boast at all it should be only in and of Christ).

So, for the glory of God and the sake of the world God so loves, do we believe?

*You are the Way, the Truth and the Life and for this we give great thanks.  
Help our unbelief, wherever it is found in our life that we may better serve  
You in Your crucified Way. Amen.*

Janice Love

**Luke 4:1-13**

**Wednesday, February 24**

### **The Temptation of Jesus**

When I saw that I had been given this passage I was relieved because this one is so easy to figure out. It's so straightforward. Jesus is tempted by the devil. Jesus resists temptation. The score is Jesus 3, Satan 0. But when the devil, in the form of a snake, presented himself to Eve, she didn't resist the temptation he offered and she and Adam were banned from the Garden of Eden. So what's the lesson? We should follow Jesus' lead and resist temptation. Right. The end.

But then I realized that nothing in the Bible is that straight forward. So I looked closer. The first thing that struck me was that the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the desert to be tempted. Why would the Holy Spirit do that? And why was Jesus being tempted anyway? He knew who He was – He knew He was the Son of God and that He was on earth to fulfill a mission. The devil knew who He was too. So why the face to face? Not being a biblical scholar, I turned to my new best friend, Google, and discovered some really interesting commentaries on this passage. For one thing, being on earth in truly human form, Jesus was put in the same league as the rest of us – open to accepting the appealing ways of this world. So He could not be expected to save us from our sins if He didn't experience the opportunity to succumb to the devil's offerings himself. One of the commentators went so far as to say that God took a huge risk sending Jesus to earth. Giving him the free will that humans have, and knowing that the devil would try to side track him from his work, what if Jesus didn't make it? What if He was unable to resist? God did have a hidden advantage though – an ace in the hole if you will. God sent the Holy Spirit to be with Jesus. To give Him strength and Help Him stay on course. Through prayer and meditation, Jesus resisted the temptations of Satan this time – and all the other times He could have stepped off the road He was on: in the Garden of Gethsemane, during His interrogations, and even while He was on the cross.

The Holy Spirit is with us too, maybe not leading us directly into temptation (my experience is that temptation seems to find me just fine all by itself), but helping us resist. We just have to ask. And listen for the answer.

*Loving Lord Jesus. Thank you for the sacrifices you made for us and for your promise of forgiveness when we stray. Help us to turn to the Holy Spirit for strength and guidance when we are tempted to follow paths that aren't yours. AMEN*

Pauline Buck

**Genesis 9:8-17**

**Thursday, February 25**



The point that his story is trying to put across is that God is repenting for washing everybody out of the world, and that he will never to do it again. He put a rainbow in the sky to resemble his covenant and to help hi remember his promise to mankind. After it rains, a rainbow will appear in the sky to remind him to stop the rain and not wash everything away like he once did.

There have been times since that God has sent messages with plagues and pandemics to affect many people soured by evil, but never since has he done so much destruction to the entire race or world.

*Lord, please help us to stay true to your Word and to never again force you to extremes to clean up our messes. We are humans and we sin, but guide us on our way to repentance and make us better people contributing to and not detracting from your magnificent world. Amen.*

Courtney, Jillian & Pat

## **Psalm 25:1-10**

### **A Psalm of David**

To you, O Lord, I pray. I trust you. Please free me from my pain. Do not let my enemies triumph. Do not let God's enemies triumph. Teach me your ways. Teach me! Teach me! You are my salvation. I'll wait for you.

Be merciful to me, and remember that you love me. I've always loved you, God. But please forget my earlier sins—I know you are good, and will do that for me.

God is good and sets a good example for humans. He especially cherishes those who are humble, and will teach the humble the right ways. Everything about the Lord is love and faithfulness, at least for those who keep the promise.

This is a song of faith and promise. David, of course, was not without enemies, nor was he without sin. But he feels able to call on God with an open heart, putting his past beside and openly and honestly calling out for help and peace.

Some say that prayer is most effective when we ask for God's blessing and don't show up with a shopping list of things we need. Probably God already has an idea of what's good for us, what we need, what direction would be best for us. Love and faithfulness seem like reasonable things to pray for. Let us hope we can be humble and pray for God's love and forgiveness.

*You, who are always with us, who recognize our sin and our failures and love us anyway; to You we pray. Be with us, remember us, keep us humble and true. Amen*

John Culter

## **1 Peter 3:18-22**

**Saturday, February 27**

### **Lenten Reflections on The First Letter of Peter, Chapter 3, verses 17-22**

In this short letter apparently from Peter to exiles in Asia Minor, the author is attempting to console Jesus' followers who are feeling beleaguered from persecution by their neighbours because of their belief in Christ. The writer reassures them, stating

in Chapter 1, verse 10:

Once you were not a people,  
But now you are God's people  
Once you had not received mercy  
But now you have received mercy.

The author urges the followers to be humble, to be honourable and to accept temporal authority. Some passages, like those in some of Paul's letter, may offend our modern more liberal sensibilities.

In the passage which I have been assigned and throughout the letter, the author reminds his followers of Christ's suffering that has brought them grace and salvation. He points out several times that it is preferable to be persecuted for being righteous and standing as a believer that being persecuted for acting self-righteously.

And in a passage that is confusing to say the least, the author links baptism to God's destruction in the story of Noah when few obeyed God's word. Yet, he also sees baptism as an appeal to God through Jesus for a good conscience as well as a plea to the risen Christ, now on the right hand of God for protection from prosecution.

The letter speaks to us even today as it reminds us that we live by the grace of God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those are what make us strong and allow us to withstand all that is thrown at us.

*Lord, stand with me. Help me to a good conscience and the ability to withstand all that surrounds and comes at me through your grace and your power. Amen*

Walter Rilkoff

This is an extremely important piece of scripture- the chapter is entitled God's covenant with Abram.

It begins with "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision" I needed to go back and read the previous three chapters to learn what "they" were. God began by calling him to leave his kin and father's house with the promise that God would make of him a great nation and his name great. Abram obeyed at age of 75. As he travelled God appeared to him, each time "staking out" the perimeters of the Promised Land. And after each visitation, Abram built an altar and invoked God's name. He endured famine, the temporary loss of his wife to the Egyptian Pharaoh, then became wealthy, settled in Canaan, only to be called and to obey God's instruction to move to Hebron. There are repeated phrases of God showing him the land and promising its inheritance for all time. He chose to rescue his nephew Lot, by taking 318 men to battle Chedorlaomer, but refused any material rewards, as God had directed him. These three chapters illustrate Abram's steadfast commitment to God and his steadfast faith. He was tested in many ways, yet never challenged God's authority. By chapter 15, God is ready to make the covenant. God uses several senses to convince Abram of the magnitude and implications of his covenant- God promises him an heir, as an old man who has been unable to conceive, then asks him to look and count the stars to comprehend the number of his descendants. Abram does not doubt God's word, but rather asks for a more concrete sign. God asks for a heifer, goat, ram, turtle dove and pigeon as offerings. He then sends Abram into a sleep with terrifying darkness when he shares the brutal future of his descendants –the 400 years of exile and slavery, but assures him of a peaceful death and a long life.

Then in the dark of night, God chooses to seal the covenant, but instead of asking Abram, to walk between the halves of the animals with God, as was the custom, God assumes both parts- the smoking fire pot and the flaming torch, that pass between the pieces of offering. God trusts Abram, but symbolically shows that He is the creator of the covenant and the orchestrator of its future. The act seals the future of Abram's descendants and sets in motion the pilgrimage of God's people. What a story this is, the hero's journey, with an ending that promises eternity that is our beginning.

*Dear God Thank you for your trust and love of Abram, for your generous and powerful covenant. May we at UHill see ourselves as tiny stars in the sky, as we imagine ourselves as descendants of Abram's faith and your everlasting covenant to care for your people. May you be our shield as we try to find our way living faithfully. Amen*

Joanne Haramia

### Psalm 27

It was January 7, not quite a week after New Year's Day, 2010. Not fully awake, I knew the day was having an auspicious beginning. When I opened my eyes, I was aware of a glorious fiery rosy colour that was beyond description. I flung open the curtains – the whole world was full of God's glory, and I couldn't help but say aloud,

"The Lord is my light, and my salvation,  
of whom shall I be afraid?!"

It was one of those moments I will never forget. The intensity, the beauty, the light – everything was amazing and told me in no uncertain terms that God's world is full of glory and beauty, and we need to remember to be aware of it.

It filled me with the certainty of knowing it is God who fills creation with beauty and light.

When we know God is good and God is love, we are surrounded with Spirit. It is like an armour that protects us in times of need.

January 7 was like seeing "the goodness of the Lord". Sometimes we don't realize it is there, but I knew for sure God's glory was all around me, and it surrounds us all if we just look! Let us try to experience it wherever we are.

One writer has said "Light symbolizes life – which is also what salvation means." If we are filled with light and salvation, what can we fear?

Another write has said, "God's face is often associated with light, and God's light and life are within us." It's like the old song says – This Little Light of Mine, I'm going to let it shine". So let's do that – let's tell the world about God's light and salvation and glory. The world yearns for this kind of message. Can't you hear the psalmist singing this with us?

*God of glory, beauty and love, fill us with the desire to offer ourselves to You with thankfulness, and to spread the words of the psalm writers and many others, to all those who wish to serve the One True Spirit. Surround us with the armour of peace and love so we may minister to those in need. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.*

Jocelyn

17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

4 I Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Tears, end, destruction, god, belly, glory, shame, minds, earthly, citizenship, heaven, Saviour. Not only does this passage use words that could be positive or negative in their context, it pairs them somewhat surprisingly within clauses. It is the “god” of the belly that is striking if grudgingly familiar.

Those first recipients of Paul’s epistle likely found food more expensive and less bountiful than the us contemporary readers, but we cannot say that in filling our shelves we have declared ourselves satisfied with our earthly wants.

Criticism of those who worship their belly or their stomach seems especially timely for Lent, a period associated with fasting. The bread of life must surely sate a hunger, but do we consume more during Lent as our stomachs fast? The collective body knows both belly and the mind, and those earthly and in heaven.

*Give us this day our daily bread, both on our tables and in ourselves.  
Forgive us our bellies that hunger for more.  
Help us to focus our minds on the body of glory and away from glorifying the earthly body.  
For we eat on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and pray that on Sunday we taste.  
Please help us to saviour the glory in the days to come. We stand firm in Your name,  
Amen.*

Michael Moll

### Jesus’ Sorrow for Jerusalem

I started out by reading many versions of LUKE. The introduction in the Renovare’ Spiritual Formation Bible was most informative regarding Luke. Luke is very interesting because many of Luke’s’ stories and parables are written in his gospel only. Such as the Good Samaritan parable and the Prodigal Son parable. Luke is the only writer to give great detail to Jesus’ birth. No other gospel gives such detail.

This lament of Jesus’ was also referred to in Matthew 23 37-39 the only other one to mention it.

I found this scripture very difficult. It did not say a lot to me. Basically it is about the Pharisees coming to Jesus, in order to scare Him into leaving Perea, which, research told me was, Herods’ domain along with Galilee. Jesus’ response was to say, the cunning threats of that “Old Fox” cannot stop me from my work because no true prophet dies outside of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not a good place to be in if you were sent by God. Yet many who went there were persecuted, scourged and stoned. Jesus knows this and yet He must go. He knows the fate that awaits Him and yet he laments for her and in doing so.... US

*“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killer of prophets,  
Abusers of the messengers of God!  
How often I’ve longed to gather your children,  
Gather your children like a hen,  
Her brood safe under her wings;  
But you refused and turned away!*

*And now it’s too late; You won’t see me again  
Until the day you say... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”*

How much does God love this world??? This is my reflection on these passages. Jesus’ incredible love for us that He would go to a city that doesn’t want Him. Be willing to suffer sooooo... much and lastly to die. On a cross. Paining and anguishing..., He knows this and yet He goes....

*Dear Father God;*

*Thanks you for your Son and the Holy Spirit that lives with us still and will remain until your return. May we in our humility ask for your continued Grace and understanding in our daily lives. Keep us ever mindful of your presence.*

*Amen*

Dianne Anderson

**Unto the Hills**

Pondering this well-known Psalm over the last three weeks has been very special for me. When I was a little girl of 5 or 6, living in the town of Ocean Falls (nestled deep in the mountains 250 miles northwest of Vancouver), my grandmother used to read this beautiful statement of faith to me. She read from the King James Bible, to which I returned for inspiration at this time. The hymn “Unto the Hills” (pg 842 in Voices United) accompanied me on this journey.

Being brought up on the North Coast, the first image which came to me was from verse 8--that of waves “going out” and “coming in”. I pictured the ocean waves rising and falling, the tides ebbing and flowing. I felt like I was on the bow of our boat, the seas gentle and calm at some times, wild and stormy at others. But we were always safe. This image has stayed with me through adulthood, cradling me in God’s loving arms no matter what the weather around me or within me.

Fast forward to November 2008. My partner Paul and I began worshipping at University Hill. The first time we entered the sanctuary, my eyes were immediately “lifted up” to the cross. I felt the presence of God in this holy place. And again, the words of Psalm 121 echoed in my head, and the opening lines of “Unto the Hills” sang to me:

“Unto the hills around do I lift up my longing eyes:  
 O whence for me shall my salvation come. from whence arise?  
 From God the Lord doth come my certain aid,  
 From God the Lord whom heaven and earth hath made.”

Three weeks after coming to UHill, we learned that our daughter Jennifer was going to die soon. The cross became a powerful metaphor for the suffering in our lives. It reminded us that we and Jennifer were indeed in God’s “holy care”. And after her death the empty cross, symbol of Jesus’ resurrection, brought us a sense of peace:

*God of the hills, God of the ocean, God of the empty cross,  
 Travel with us on our journey, wherever it may take us.  
 And keep us ever mindful that You, who neither slumber nor sleep,  
 Will keep us henceforth, yea for evermore.  
 Amen*

Betty McGill

I have just learned how to estimate costs. Not that I didn’t have any idea about costs, income and balance before. But as an academic in the human sciences I’ve long thought it had nothing to contribute to my world, except as a way to figure out how our income can be made to cover housing, food, clothes and hopefully provide some extra for vacation. But my teachers in the method of calculation have not been talking much about figures or money. Instead I’ve learned that a budget and cost estimation are pedagogical methods on how to talk about goals and resources. And this makes me wonder if this is what Jesus is up to when he gathers both disciples and all the people. Is he saying: “Listen, you have to figure out what is good in life and measure the value of the present? Then you should estimate the value of what you are aiming for and find out what you need to do to get there!” Where can a suggestion like this lead us?

This is an example:

<b>Value the present</b>	<b>Resources to get to my goal/ Costs and expenses</b>	<b>Goal in life/ Benefits</b>
My family	time to be together	a life with my family
Health	time for exercise and money to eat nutritious food	health
Seeking peace	time and discipline	find peace

In the columns above I clearly see the words *time* and *money*. What do they symbolize? *Time* is a priority. What do I do with time? Is the time mine? Is the time a gift? *Money* has to be spent well, spent wisely, and maybe saved for days to come. Is there a difference in viewing life and time as MY life and time, or as something **GOD** provides me with? If my life and time is a gift given from God the creator I ask: do I spend time differently than if I just take it for granted? In Jewish faith everything we have is a gift from God. I can add value and make more of what I have been given, but I can’t profit selfishly from things that are given me or other people.

When it comes to work and paycheck I wonder if there is any difference in value between my work time compared to my children’s work time at school, or compare to the time of the unemployed, or of the sick, or the retired. I hope that I can value every person’s time and life as highly as my own. It is a challenge to me to spend my time, so that I don’t misuse other people’s time. Life and time is a gift from God given by grace to spend

abundantly. What is the purpose of that? Spend the life for the Kingdom of God! To me this is to take my cross and follow Jesus my Savior.

*Dear God, when I estimate costs, let there be a column labeled: "for the Kingdom of God!" And if I can't put an x-mark in that column, let that challenge me to change something in the other columns, i.e. my life, to make it happen. And if I find it impossible – give me the wisdom to see and change my way of living and valuing life – my life and other people's lives. Amen.*

Karin Sundmark

**Romans 4:13-25**

**Saturday, March 6**

"He is the father of us all."

I don't share this very often, but I'm actually Jewish.

Not Jewish in the Jewish versus Christian sense. Jewish as in Jewish. As in having a Jewish mother and relatives (albeit very, very distant ones) who perished in the holocaust. Not to mention a second cousin who fled to Israel after swindling my grandfather.

Judaism and Christianity are often held in opposition to one another.

Old Testament versus New Testament.

Law versus Grace.

Salvation by Works versus Salvation by Faith.

But what does it really mean to be a Jew?

There is one God. He has called a particular people out from the nations and made a covenant with them. He gave them a home and a way of living (Torah) and promised them that he would be with them always and would preserve them as a people. He also promised them, when they were in trouble, that he would send them a savior (messiah).

There is none of this that I do not believe. That's why, while I can never bring myself to pray Salaat with Muslims, since it affirms something that I do not believe to be true (the prophethood of Muhamed), I am always happy to pray with my Jewish friends and to go

to Shabbat services once in a while. Because there is nothing in Judaism that I do not affirm.

This text has often been used to uphold the division between Jews and Christians, between Law and Grace. But right in the middle of it is the affirmation that Abraham is the father of us all. Christianity is really a Jewish religion - how can we be opposed to one another? We worship the Jewish Messiah - the savior who was sent to fulfill the Jewish covenant and who proclaimed himself "King of the Jews." The oft-repeated phrase "Jesus was Jewish" has more implications than simply pointing out Jesus' ethnicity.

Plus, there's plenty of Grace in the "Old" Testament and plenty of Law in the New one.

I know that I'm supposed to dissect this whole text, but I think that picking out this one line is important, because it's a line that we often forget.

Abraham is our father, whether we've got a Jewish mother or not.

**Isaiah 55:1-9**

**Sunday, March 7**

**Then and Now; Now and Then**

**Isaiah 55 : 1 – 9**

The time of the Exile was one of great spiritual upheaval for the scattered Hebrews. The distraught exiles were regularly reminded that the destruction of the Temple and their dispersion to Babylon were acts of Yahweh, who was punishing them for their sinfulness. There was a deep-seated belief that goodness and prosperity, wickedness and adversity always traveled in pairs. Yahweh's treatment brought great dishonour to the exiles and they wallowed in self-pity and hopelessness.

The great prophet Isaiah did not give up the conviction that a long-suffering Yahweh was purifying his people with this disgrace, but he changed the emphasis in dealing with his people's suffering. It was revealed to Isaiah that in God's divine plan to save mankind, the result of this suffering was redemptive – the faithful few suffering for the undeserving many. Israel's disgrace could then be seen as the agent of God's saving grace to all mankind – and became not a backward look to retribution but a forward look to salvation. Now is the time for reconciliation and celebration! Yahweh is in the market place, cupping his hand and calling to all who will listen: *"Come home, my Children. It's time to gather the family again. I welcome you with a promise of life-giving food; good, rich food – free! Don't turn away, listen to me. Give up your old habits – they don't bring you abundant life. Return to me, and know that you are a blessed and forgiven people. Come.*

*Just a word of warning – don't think you can ever figure me out! It is enough for you to know that I love you with an everlasting love. Come."*

*Faithful God,  
I see something of your Face in these holy words, but I get only a fleeting understanding of your Mind. I am not you, God, but I am yours, God, and I rest in the knowledge of your everlasting love, and in the hope that one day, I may see you face-to-face. Amen!*

Margaret Skarsgard

**Psalm 63: 1-8**

**Monday, March 8**

For us who live on the Canadian West coast, water shortage is an occasional and generally short-lived inconvenience. Immediate access to clean, cold water we take for granted. At most, our thirst is a temporary, short-lived sensation.

On the other hand, in the past few weeks, the media have made us conscious of the ordeal of residents of Port-au-Prince in Haiti, who have been rescued from the rubble of their city. After days, even in a few cases a week or more of being buried alive under tons of concrete in their earthquake-devastated city, a few survivors have miraculously been helped from their living tomb. Again and again, their overwhelming physical sensation has been deep thirst. The companion to this profound parchedness was an intense yearning to see again the light of day, the blue of the sky, the green and brown of the earth, the faces of one's loved ones.

Psalm 63 is filled with such vigorously physical images. None is more striking than that of the opening verse, where the author imagines him- or herself crossing a stretch of the hot, dry uplands that are, for six months of the year, so characteristic of Palestine. The land is dry, the day apparently endless, and the thirst of the traveller intensifies a sense of fatigue that is transferred onto the terrain itself: "as in a dry and weary land where there is no water".

What moves this reflection is a yearning, so real it is physically palpable, for the presence of God. The author has known, even dares to say has "seen" God in the house of worship (verse 2). That memory is precious; it comes to mind in wakeful moments of the night. It arouses other physical sensations – of a splendid rich meal (verse 5); it sets the lips quivering with song (verses 3, 5). But the memories of past experiences cannot suffice; indeed they intensify the longing, even as we imagine the water-haunted delirium of earthquake victims. To recall the joy that God's faithfulness has awakened in the past is to know of a certainty that God alone can quench the thirst, can satisfy the human heart.

*Give to me yourself, O Lord, this day, and be for me that inward spring of living water bringing fullness of life.*

R. Gerald Hobbs

**1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

**Tuesday, March 9**



Oskar is 10 years and is in grade 4 at Maria Montessori school in Lund. He plays soccer and takes art classes.

Here is his prayer: Help me God to find the exit when I am scared and threatened. Amen

*Help me God to find the exit when I am scared and threatened. Amen*

Oscar Sundmark

**“You say *kopros* I say *karpos*”**

Back in Chapter 12 you hear Jesus say “How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?” (12:56). Chapter 13 sounds like a few people taking a stab at doing just that. They remind everyone of the Galileans Pilate recently killed and suggest their interpretation. Jesus’ response, “I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (vs. 3 NAS), reveals that their interpretation is off. Where they saw divine judgment in a tit-for-tat, quid-pro-quo way of thinking Jesus responds with an emphatic No! Jesus adds to this another current event in order to expose the flaw in their thinking with the story – “18 Die at Siloam” (an oxymoron –Siloam being that place of healing and life). Again we hear Jesus say “I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (vs. 5 NAS)

REPENT! Such a word. Incorrectly understood it spills over with guilt and the ills of society with the hope of confession. Is that all Jesus is asking here? I tell you, No! Jesus is again asking us for much more?

Repent, that Greek word, *metanoia* made of two smaller words *meta* meaning to change and *noia* meaning thinking or understanding, asks us to change. The kingdom is about letting go of thinking from this equation based living – letting go of our if-A-then-B type of understanding. The story of the fig tree illustrates this change by telling us that its purpose for taking up space is to bear fruit. Our purpose for taking up space seems to be to *metanoia*. The change of thinking is the one we resist the most – transformation – something that takes places mysteriously like it is with plants – not based on our efforts. Stepping into this life of the kingdom takes place more through our failings than through our success. Jesus in his enduring sense of humour has the vinedresser make use of dung (from *kopros*) to produce the fruit (*karpos*). Hilarious! But incredibly challenging.



“gracenotes” Sarah Gilman - friend working in Haiti

Haiti is our current news story – how will you respond? What is God calling you to *metanoia*? How is tit-for-tat, *quid-pro-quo* making you perish?

*Dear Jesus You believe in us more than we do. You say live boldly in our kopros (failures) we say we want only want sanitized karpos (fruit). Give us the courage to live lives of your fruitful transformation from the nutrients of failing dunghill ways of living. Amen*

Rod Olson

**The Ten Commandments**

*“You shall have no other gods before me...you shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate me.”*

Jealousy in human relationships is not a pretty thing. A jealous partner is insecure; nothing we can do for them is enough to assure them of our love, and they can fly into a rage over imaginary infidelities.

Why would we want to serve a jealous God?

If God’s jealousy were like human jealousy, we wouldn’t. But the ‘jealousy’ of God is different. God speaks these words (Exodus 20:1-17) to his people after saving them from the Egyptians, bringing them through the desert, and defending them from their foes. God is offering them an exclusive relationship, and these are the terms.

They have seen God’s fierce devotion to them; God says, “I am the Lord thy God *who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*” God’s introduction is not a name, but rather a recounting of their relationship thus far. Everything else follows from this identity. God is one who is faithful, and expects faithfulness in return.

Unlike a jealous human relationship, however, this relationship is very simple: God commits herself wholly to us, and we commit ourselves wholly to God. This putting God first is the basis for the whole relationship. If we put God first, the commandments which follow are not an exhaustive and unreasonable laundry list of dos and don’ts; this behavior comes naturally if your truly make God the centre of your life. Four of the forbidden behaviours concern relationship to God, and six to our neighbours. But they are all equal because they all amount to the same thing: to commit these offenses is to destroy the relationship that God and his people are building together.

God's love is "jealous" in that it is absolute; if we recognize God as the one who has loved us in the past, and we commit to a loving relationship in the future, we commit to being as constant as God is. We cannot worship God today, and money or sex or power or security tomorrow. If we put God first, if we acknowledge God as *our* Lord, *our* God, then the rest of the commandments follow naturally.

*Wise and loving God,  
We treasure what we like to call our freedom,  
and balk when you or anyone tries to limit that freedom.  
Help us to realize that what seems like servitude  
is relationship with the one in whom we live and move  
and have our being;  
help us to choose you  
and reject the freedom to wander in the desert.  
Amen.*

Tim Bowman

## Psalm 19

Friday, March 12

### "The Heavens are telling"

You, the great crafter  
Sun spinner  
Moon carver  
Eden maker  
Life giver

You made the heavens and the earth  
Shaped us and breathed into us  
Us, mere creatures of mud

And yet, for us you give  
Your law  
Your love  
Your son

Your grace.

*Creator,  
Let the beauty of the world instruct us  
The silence of the day's speech and night's stillness inspire us  
Your word give us joy  
Your law give us life.*

Amen

Erin Tarbuck

## 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25

Saturday, March 13

To be added

Joshua 5: 9-12

Sunday, March 14



Dear Lord,  
Please watch over those who need your care and guidance.

Amen

Elizabeth

Psalm 32

Monday, March 15<sup>th</sup>

Silence  
Heavy burden  
Blackened wasted bodies  
Lonely ashen arid parched  
Stifled

Open  
Releasing all  
Guilty hidden sinful  
Now relieved uplifted happy  
Unlocked

Music  
Forgiving song  
Brighten joyful spirits  
Hidden transgressions are revealed  
Absolved

Faithful  
Offer tributes  
Protect preserve surround  
Saving us from isolation  
Trusting

Lessons  
Repair renew refresh ourselves  
Watching over  
Embracing steadfast love  
Rejoice

*A Crown Cinquain*

Sara Daniells

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

**Tuesday, March 16**

Before reading my passage, I just *had* to look up what came before it. The verses before the ones assigned to me talk about making a decision to live our lives from a ‘focused center.’ That center is an understanding that “Everyone [is] in the same boat.”

Once I know this- and really understand it- *then* I can become Christ’s representative. Once I know that we’re all in the same boat, then I won’t attach value to people based on what they look like, or how I see them live their life, or any other myriad of measly, insignificant, humanity-bound observations. Once I can see how this statement is truer than I’d like it be some days, then I will see how it weaves through the human experience. I will find a reserve of Fresh Start that is for the handing out to those around me.

Quite simply, God has given us the task to tell others of what He is up to and to become a part of it ourselves by putting things Right. Let’s be honest. Much has gone wrong between us and the earth,  
    between us and each other,  
        between us and God, and  
            between us and ourselves.

Which of these four broken parts of creation am I actively involved in setting right? Which am I ignoring? As a church, are we seeking to be ministers of reconciliation, of putting things Right? Have we allowed this task to be overshadowed by our good works or easily laid judgments? Christ led by example. He has taken the wrong on himself, so that we could be in relationship with and ministers of the Right.

Joline Olson

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

**Tuesday, March 16**

**The Tearful Letter**

2 Corinthians is the tearful letter.

We enter its doorway and move into the interior of the anguished heart of Paul. During Paul’s second visit to the disputatious Corinthian church he encountered a Hellenistic Jewish-Christian group who claimed to be super-apostles. They had access to heavenly secrets. They challenged his apostolic credentials.

Who is this ugly man of so little eloquence? But Paul turned the tables on these persons of inflated self-importance. He declared that the strength of God is revealed in our vulnerability and weakness. For Paul, the “love of Christ” (2 Cor. 5: 14) undermines all claims to special treatment or superior wisdom. The love that “urges us on” cuts through all worldly standards (vs. 16-19).

He reminds his readers that those who are “in Christ” participate in a “whole new creation” (vs. 17b). This marvellous phrase signals, for Paul, that the crucified and risen Christ has begun the process of making all things new. We in all our confusion, affliction and puzzlement are to be Christ’s living and loving presence in the darkness of the world.

Thus, when Paul speaks of his “ministry of reconciliation” (vs. 18), he beautifully links God’s call to be reconciled to him (vs. 20) and our reconciliation to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The radical gospel upsets all status hierarchies; the body of Christ cannot tear itself apart. It must be what God wants, and urges us, to build here, below (vs. 21).

Yet our hearts can burst out with joy as we know that in the crucified and risen Christ, our degraded earth and suffering humanity will also be healed of all brokenness. One day!



St Oran’s Chapel tomb recess of John, the last Lord of the Isles, 1503. Iona Abbey, Scotland. Photo by C. Philippe-Welton, 2006.

*O Most Holy One  
We move out of the anguished heart of Paul  
Into your forgiving presence  
Heal our broken church universal  
Help us to be a knitted, faithful and loving people of God  
Here, below, now.*

Michael Welton

**Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

**Wednesday, March 17**



First from Sigrid. She is taking lots of photos and she thinks that this photo from Paris is a good illustration to her text. Sigrid went to Paris in December with her French class and most of the photos are of birds and buildings and her friends. Sigrid is 15 (16 in July)

and will finish compulsory school, Maria Montessori School in Lund this summer and go to High school in September.

*Dear God, please watch over us each moment of our lives. Please forgive us the mistakes we make, and let others forgive us as well. Thank you for letting us come to you and confess our sins, thank you for always having your arms open for us. Amen*

Sigrid

**1 Samuel 16:1-13**

**Thursday, March 18**

**Fill your horn with oil**

"Fill your horn with oil and set out." Sounds like an odd instruction! But perhaps Samuel was used to strange commands from God at this point. God was sending Samuel to select a successor to Saul as king of Israel. After getting over some initial fears of punishment by Saul, Samuel sets out to Bethlehem under the pretense of making a sacrifice to the Lord.

Samuel was to select one of Jesse's sons as the next king, but God didn't tell him which one to pick in advance. Instead, they all gathered at the sacrifice. Initially, Samuel thought that Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, must be "the Lord's anointed." But then God informed Samuel otherwise, and told him that he was looking at the "heart" and not outward appearances. It seems that God's communication with Samuel must have been pretty direct and forceful, and not just some vague feeling that Samuel had. This seems especially clear since Samuel looked over each of Jesse's sons at the sacrifice and declared that God had chosen none of them. He was confident enough to ask if all of Jesse's sons were present. Now we find out that one is missing. David, the youngest, is out tending the sheep.

Samuel has David sent for and they all wait for him to arrive. God tells Samuel that David is the one. So Samuel puts his horn of oil into action and anoints him. Were David's brothers jealous? Was Jesse surprised? Maybe everyone was just confused. We don't know exactly what happens next, other than that the spirit of the Lord came to David and that Samuel left and returned to Ramah. David goes on to enter Saul's service as a musician, which is not necessarily what you might expect for a future king. Read on through chapter 17 for the classic story of David and Goliath.

Fill your horn with oil!  
Samuel finds the shepherd boy  
David anointed

Lord, may your guidance to us be as clear as it was to Samuel.

Scott Webster

John 9:1-41

Saturday, March 20

Ephesians 5:8-14

Friday, March 19

**Light**

A million-or-so years ago I was a student at Columbia University in the City of New York, which has as its motto, *"In lumine tuo videbimus lumen"* or "in your light we shall see light." It is perhaps surprising that as secular an institution as Columbia would have as its motto something Biblical (Psalm 36:9), but *light* in the secular context Columbia intends is understood to be the world's antidote for ignorance. In other words, light is knowledge, pure and simple, and all knowledge is good because it illuminates the unknown.

But St. Paul in today's passage from Ephesians is using *light* in an altogether different and much more unsettling way. In Paul's context light is God's antidote not for ignorance but for immorality, and this because light exposes whatever it is that we would rather keep hidden in the darkness. Indeed, one can conceal something in a dark place for a very long time, but all it takes is for someone to turn on the light for just a moment, and one's darkest (there's that darkness again) secret is out.

Paul reminds us that we (like him) once lived in this darkness—he actually phrases this even more strongly, stating that we once *were* darkness—but that we too have like him been called into the light. It thus behooves us to live not the way we once did, but rather like the new "children of light" that we are.

Of course, this is good advice, but what does it actually mean to be a child of light?

Paul is encouraging us to live as if we truly were God's lights in a darkened world, which I think means not only our helping to bring knowledge and understanding to wherever ignorance and folly still reign, but also carrying the brilliant torch of goodness, righteousness and truth in service of Christ, and doing so in a world whose very nature is to hate this light. This will surely be for us a daily challenge, and it will never be easy, but thanks be to God, we *do* have God's promise of all the assistance we'll ever need for as long as it takes.

The last verse of the reading proclaims all this so beautifully that I think it can serve as God's prayer for us today,

*"Wake up, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Amen"*  
Peter Nosco

**Who do I say I am?**

I am the light of the world

I am the Son of Man

I came into the world so that those who do not see may see

I am the gate for the sheep

I am the gate

I am the good shepherd

I am God's son

The Father is in me and I am in the Father

The Father and I are one

**Who do they say I am?**

This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath

We do not know where he comes from

How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs

He is a prophet

Blasphemy

You, though only human, are making yourself God

**Who do you say I am?**

1 .....

2 .....

3 .....

4 .....

*Lord Jesus, May I never forget who you are - my creator, saviour, redeemer and friend.  
Amen*

Gary Gibson

**Isaiah 43: 16-21**

**Sunday, March 21**

It's a wonderful passage, and a haunting one. What does it mean to not remember the past, or the 'former things.' Why not remember the past? Surely the faith of Israel, and indeed Christians, is built on what God has done 'in the past'. We recite the 'wondrous deeds' of God who led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, across the reed Sea, through the Sinai wilderness, etc. As Christians we witness to Jesus, his life, death, and his resurrected life in us. The faith and proclamation of the people was and is built on God's faithfulness to us throughout history.

"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old!" I see this rhetorical exclamation as saying two things. God is saying, in effect, (1) "You ain't seen nothin' yet! I'm about to do something for you that's totally new!" and (2) But don't get stuck on the past memories, so you can't perceive and receive what I'm going to do right NOW!"

That's who God is. Never finished creating, never finished coaxing new life from death, hope out of despair, beauty from ashes. The Israelite people had lived a long time in Babylon, before they heard this good news. They had experienced a lot of death, loneliness, despair. A lot of ashes. The road home to their land would be tough, and who knows? Maybe it won't be worth it.

It reminds of times I have been afraid to move out into the unknown future. "Wilderness" can have a lot of faces. Scary, lonely, forsaken, wild, maybe even lost. But what God promised to the people then is also a promise to us now, individually and collectively. God will create a way through whatever uncertain future faces us. A Way. A path, a place to walk through, and streams of water to quench our thirst. The wilderness itself is not subdued. But God makes a way. What more could we ask for?

For me, the "more" is found in the "wild beasts." This amazing touch of the jackals and ostriches honouring God is very powerful. All of creation is gathered into the circle of God's creating and creative love. And the creation itself sings God's praise! All of us – jackals and children and trees and insects and old men and ostriches and birds and women and fish and oceans and stars and everyone.

Can we believe that God is "doing a new thing" among us, right here, right now?

Helen Hobbs

**Psalm 126**

**Monday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**Laughter from the Seeds of Tears**



Jameson and I stopped by Bob Kingsmill's studio today in Coldstream, which is right next to Vernon. Bob is an internationally recognized potter (stop by his shared studio on Granville Island or drop by St. Andrew's chapel, just up from the Epiphany chapel, to see the wall plaques he has done). Bob is very grandfatherly - a kind and witty man who likes to gently tease Jameson whenever we stop by for a visit. Serendipitously, Bob and Jameson worked on a piece of clay together for fun. Jameson brought the piece home and began to shape the outside edge of it. I noticed it and pointed out to Jameson the now teardrop shape of the piece. We decided then and there that it was perfect for the text he had been assigned for Lent - Psalm 126, which sings out its hope and trust in God's ability to bring laughter and new life from the seeds of our tears.

**Prayer:** *Thank you God for bringing laughter from our tears. Do this again we pray. Amen.*

Jameson Love

**Philippians 3:4b-14**

To be added

**Tuesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**John 12:1-8**

**Wednesday, March 24**

### **Anointing**



Dear God,  
I hope you love us and give us healthy food.  
Amen

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

**Thursday, March 25**

**Dem Dry Bones – Reconstructed and Spirit-filled**

Ah, that childhood song comes to mind immediately! But upon closer reading, two points struck me in this text, going beyond knee bones connected to thigh bones . . . .

Ezekiel’s response to God’s question “Mortal, can these bones live?” seems a wise one. Of course, upon seeing a pile of bones, the obvious answer is a simple “no”. But Ezekiel replies “O Lord God, you know”. This is not just a cop-out answer to avoid getting it wrong. In these words lies a great confidence in God’s power to do things beyond our imagining. We may struggle today to have such confidence that great things are possible, that God is not bounded as we are. Ezekiel is then told to prophesy that they shall know the Lord, likely a knowing similar to the one Ezekiel had in his response.

Ezekiel is told to prophesy twice. The first prophesy is to the dry bones to hear the word of the Lord that he will rebuild their bodies and breathe in them. The second prophesy is to the breath to make the rebuilt people truly live. I struggled with this part of the text, but there appears to be a deliberate separation between the act of the bones to listen and the act of the breath (Spirit) to enter.

I think this distinction between two prophesies may be at the heart of the text. It separates the act of the dead (those of us left deconstructed and without hope) from that of God. While God is the one who rebuilds, the bones must first listen to God’s message of hope and calling to know him. It is a message for us to turn to God and allow him to make us new. This ability to make new in itself seems amazing, but once we turn and the rebuilding is complete, God gives us an even greater gift. It is the gift of His Spirit that truly brings life. This text is a message of hope: God can make new and does not simply turn away to leave us on our own – He is with us.

*Lord, we strive to trust in your power, to know you. We turn to you to be made new, and give thanks for the gift of your Spirit.*

**Romans 8:6-11**

**Friday, March 26**

**In the Spirit** (Romans 8:6-11)

In this passage, Paul tells us that we are “in the Spirit” and that the “Spirit of God dwells” in us; we are not “in the flesh.” This is the defining characteristic of the Christian life. But, what does it mean for us to be “in the Spirit” and not “in the flesh?” When Paul

speaks about being in the flesh, he means looking at things from a human point of view. To be “in the flesh” is to see only limitations, barriers, brokenness, discord, sin, and death. The flesh sees only what the mind can comprehend; it doesn’t see into the realm of limitless possibilities. The flesh is focused on itself and its wants and desires; it does not - indeed cannot- submit to God’s law. Paul says that “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.” This is a pretty grim picture because the only possible outcome of a life lived “in the flesh” is death and despair.

To be “in the Spirit,” however, is an entirely different matter. Paul says that “to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” To be “in the Spirit” is to see limitless possibilities, wholeness, purity, righteousness, harmony, and life. It is to look beyond one’s self and to focus on God. To be “in the Spirit” is to be in a relationship with God that is all embracing, and all-loving.

The good news of the Gospel is that not only are we called to be “in the Spirit,” but the gracious gift of God to us is that the Spirit of God dwells in us. The paradox of the Christian faith is that gift and demand go hand-in-hand. What God asks of us is what God has already given to us: that we abide in the Spirit who indeed abides within us.

Thanks be to God!

*Gracious and loving God, in the midst of us setting our minds on the flesh, you call to us and ask us to set our minds on the Spirit. You send your Spirit to dwell within us and lead our hearts and minds to you. You give us life and peace where once there was only death and discord. When our minds begin to wander down paths that lead to sin and separation from you, by your Spirit lead us instead to you and your will for us, that we might have life and peace. Amen.*

Nathan Wright

**John 11:1 - 45**

**Saturday, March 27**

Resurrection  
Not always in terms of literal rising from death  
Resurrection from:

Grief.  
Depression.  
Indifference.  
Unkindness.  
Automation.

Many of us long for such resurrection. Yet we must remember that before resurrection came crucifixion. We must let God lead and realize that the answers to our prayers do not always come in the way that we expected. It is not often as simple as the raising of the dead.

*Creator,*

*Walk with us in this time of lent as we return to face the cross. Bring us to resurrection in your way and help us to let you lead. Amen*

Tara

**Luke 19:28-40**

**Palm Sunday, March 28**

### **The coming of Jesus to Jerusalem**

Why did Jesus ride in on a donkey never ridden, not a mare or a noble steed why not? Which two disciples did he send and why just two not three or four disciples? Also why go to Jerusalem, why not Bethphage or Bethany? I think that maybe Luke should have been clearer on what disciples were sent and how many. Why did they throw their cloaks on the ground for the donkey to step on? Also I think that the people would put palm leaves down on the ground for the donkey. How many in the multitude of people? The whole city? Half? How many Pharisees were there in total and how many came? I don't think that the Pharisees could have ordered Jesus to make the disciples stop. Also I think that Jesus could not have been true when he said that the rocks would cry out because rocks are inanimate objects. The trees and grass, not so much, because they are living things.

*Dear Lord God guide us in the path of our lives to give us the power to face our fears and throw our cloaks on the ground for you to guide us on our donkey ride through life in Jesus name we pray Amen.*

Noah

**Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

**Monday, March 29**

### **STEADFAST LOVE**

Today's scripture is rich in familiar phrases. Yet it was on the phrase that brackets the reading that my attention has dwelt these past few days. *"O give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."*

*"Steadfast"* is one of those old-fashioned words that seems to have lost favour over the years. In an age when many marriages end in divorce and extra-marital affairs make frequent news, steadfastness does not seem to be the most common or popular quality of love. Indeed, many of us might say we'd want to be on the receiving end of love that was deep, caring, passionate, romantic or mutually edifying before steadfast came to mind.

The word has its origins in Old English as *"standing firm"*. That's a common dictionary definition although one source describes *"steadfast"* as *"staying the course, not being tempted to deviate"*.

It is from the latter that we may be reminded that God's love has a committed course. In the Old Testament we see it in His covenant to love His people and His loyalty to that covenant in spite of their disloyalty, wavering away and sin. We might say, *"That's easy for God to do"*. But in the New Testament we see it in Jesus' unswerving dedication to the cross in spite of the treatment he suffered in the hands of men and the temptations to save his own life. As fully human, that could not have been easy.

It is good in this period of Lent that we remind ourselves that God's love toward us, individually and collectively, is constant, not subject to change, regardless of how little faith we may have had sometimes. It may also be good for us to ask ourselves about the steadfastness of our love to God and to each other, our staying the course of our commitments, and how we can deal better with our temptations to deviate from them.

*Steadfast Lover,  
please give us the strength, the courage and the insight  
to be steadfast in our love for you and for each other.  
Amen.*

Brian

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12**

**Tuesday, March 30**

### **The Suffering Servant**

Such a familiar passage to Christians. It is hard to read Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12 without hearing the music of the Messiah and seeing the hanging figure of Jesus on that cross.

However this poem was written centuries before, at or near the end of the Babylonian Captivity. The most widely held opinion about the identity of the suffering servant is that we are reading another poem of hope to Israel about itself and God's on-going plan.

During Lent, can we dare to attempt to read this passage as a word to us without the images of Christ preventing us from seeing anything else. Certainly most of us have not been dragged from our homes and marched into a foreign land but perhaps we, too, are captives longing to come home. Due to uncertainty about the meaning of some of the Hebrew words, I decided to use the New Jewish Publication translation in attempt to hear God speaking without the overtones of the New Testament. I have difficulty seeing Israel as an entity separate from the people and wonder if God sees Canada and Canadians as separate entities and wonder what the Lord is saying to us. Can we hear God speaking to us as a nation and as individuals in this passage?

Two characters in this poem, God and we(the people of Israel), both speak to describe the appearance and actions of the third, the servant, Israel, who remains silent.

Listen to the voice of God contrasting the divine view of the servant with that of human beings.

*Behold, my servant shall prosper, be exalted and raised to great heights...  
Many were appalled at him- so marred was his appearance, unlike that of man...  
Kings shall be silenced because of him, they shall see what has not been told them...*

Hear 'we' speaking in the first 6 verses of chapter 53.

*Who can believe what we have been heard?  
Upon whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

Then "we" describes the despised one: "No form or beauty ..., no charm.. shunned by men... a man of suffering.... we held him of no account".

However, suddenly in verse 4, the mood changes as "we" realizes that it was "our sickness that he was bearing, our suffering that he endured,... [that ]he was wounded because of our sins,... [that ]he bore the chastisement that made us whole...."

Can we see ourselves here? Ready to judge but reluctant to see our role in the suffering, in the shunning, in the mess we have made of God's world.

With "we's" recognition that "the Lord visited upon him the guilt of us all" again "we" hears the voice of God speaking, describing the dreadful suffering of the servant, silent and submissive, who "made himself an offering for guilt, he has done no injustice, spoken no falsehood."

And to the unasked question, "Why?" The answer given is, "That through him, the Lord's purpose might prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see it, he shall enjoy it through his devotion."

*Oh God , we are stunned that your purpose can entail such great anguish freely accepted through devotion to you and we struggle to understand how your "righteous servant [who]makes the many righteous." might apply even to us. We pray in the name of your Son who suffered and died for us. Amen*

**Philippians 2:5-11**

**Wednesday, March 31**

### **A wellspring of welcome**

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul shows himself as one who can't help but look on the bright side. He sits in prison, as punishment for spreading the Christian message but notes it has had the opposite effect—he's managed to pique the interest of his prison guards and spread the Word to them as well.

Paul encourages his followers to keep the faith by maintaining a united front against such intimidation. And key to supporting one another is to live the life that Jesus did, with humility and a view to the interests of all, not just himself. Despite being the Son of God, he did not carry himself with a sense of entitlement but rather the opposite; he humbled himself as he carried out his life's purpose.

The passage is a reminder to me of one of the reasons it took me so long to embrace church and Christianity. I knew too many people who had been devout but did not behave toward others in a way I would consider Christian. In these verses I see not only guidance in how best to conduct myself in everyday life, but perhaps the wellspring of UHill's warm welcome to strangers in its midst, which led us to join the congregation and for me to be baptized.

I am still early in my journey of discovery but am comforted in knowing that in some ways, discipleship is a group effort, and that I am not alone in my travels.

*Gracious God,  
Show me the right path, not the one with the least obstacles, but the one that leads me to your door.*

Wanda Chow

**The Lord's Supper**

Paul, writing to the Corinthians from Ephesus, was particularly concerned with the problems facing the church of God in Corinth, a place where he had brought Christianity some years before. He appeals to the brothers and sisters of the church to refrain from quarreling and stop the divisions, which are causing such trouble. His "fatherly admonitions" lead him to advise the members on much of their behaviour, and he sets out many directions or rules ranging from a condemnation of sexual immorality, a disapproval of lawsuits among believers, advice about marriage, the eating of food offered to idols, the head coverings of women, and the rights of an apostle. He complains of the abuses at the Lord's Supper, where the Corinthians apparently have acted greedily, eating their own suppers while someone might go hungry and another become drunk. For this reason he sets out carefully the institution of the Lord's Supper which has now become one of the two main sacraments celebrated by our United Church. Beginning with the words "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you" he then describes the Lord's Supper as we have come to know it, ending "for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes".

The great apostle teaches the Corinthians (and us) the importance of the memorial way of considering the Lord's Supper. And so all Christians remember that meal at the time of Passover where Jesus met with his disciples and predicted his own death. When I was young we celebrated communion in Greenwood United church. It was always a solemn occasion. The elders of the church distributed the grape juice (unfermented because of the temperance movement) in small glasses, which we held in our hands until all had been served. Then, when the minister gave the signal by lifting his glass we all drank the grape juice simultaneously, putting the glasses in special holders built into the pews after we had finished. I thought at the time that it was an immutable ceremony. And that Greenwood United would always be there. Greenwood United was renamed for a past moderator. Then it burned down and was rebuilt as a senior's home. Time has changed almost everything but the Lord's Supper remains, and is part of our great tradition. Now, of course, I realize that there are many ways in many churches to remember the Lord's Supper; some with specially baked bread, some with wafers, others with wine instead of grape juice, but always it is a central part of our Christian tradition of remembrance.

*Gracious God, Help us to partake of the bread and the wine of communion, as Paul has taught us, in a worthy manner, remembering always that Jesus will come again.*

Laurenda Daniells

**John 18:1-19:42****Good Friday, April 2****Tragedy on a Friday**

*Cast of characters (in order of appearance):*

Jesus of Nazareth, his disciples, Judas, a detachment of soldiers, police from the chief priests & the Pharisees, Simon Peter, Malchus (a slave), an officer, Annas, Caiaphas, another disciple, a woman (guard), slaves & police, Pilate, the Jewish crowd, Barabbas, chief priests, Jesus' mother, Jesus' aunt, Mary (wife of Clopas), Mary Magdalene, a disciple (the one Jesus loved), Joseph of Arimathea (a secret disciple), Nicodemus (who came to Jesus by night).

*Directions to the players:*

There are parts for everyone in the company to play - choose yours. Enacting the confusion and tension, the courage amid injustice and the struggle to know what to do reminds the players and the audience that the gospel leads to - and through - the turmoil witnessed on this stage.

Notice that in this telling of the story Jesus knows "all that was to happen to him" (18:4). When told that the soldiers come to arrest Jesus of Nazareth, he responds three times with "I Am" - the name of God that is revealed to Moses at the burning bush. His last words in this script are: "It is Accomplished". This Jesus is confident that this tragedy on a Friday is not the end of the story of God's good news.

The character of Peter, on the other hand, is not confident. He responds to the apparent powerlessness of Jesus with violence - so like the church in wanting to take control when God seems to fail. Commanded by Jesus to put away his sword, Peter opts to flee. Twice he responds to interrogators who suspect him of a life of discipleship with the words "I Am Not". In Peter's three word denial the church hears the voice of its own lack of confidence in God when faced with failure, loss and trouble.

As the curtain comes down on the final scene the company of actors and the audience leave the theatre. There is a long intermission. It is called Saturday. On Saturday the dramatic question posed by Jesus' confidence in God's future and Peter's lack of confidence in the face of all the evidence remains unanswered. Many assume that what is called an intermission is actually the final curtain. We wait for Sunday to see if the

curtain will rise to reveal the promised new act of God - one in which even Peter will have a part to play.

*Holy God, we dare to trust that Friday is never the last day, so we watch for the new day of life. Hear our prayer and be your full self toward us. Amen.*

Ed Searcy

**Job 14:1-14**

**Saturday, April 3**

### **Holy Saturday**

Perhaps I cheated a bit – I actually asked for the text for Holy Saturday because I thought that the concept of ‘waiting’ fit my life at present quite well. I have been through the deaths of three family members and one friend and I feel as if I am waiting to feel joy again. I have also been in a sort of spiritual waiting as well, waiting for the hand of God to lift me out of my grief. And so I thought that whatever text I would be given for Holy Saturday would help me reflect on the spirituality of waiting.

Well, the old adage of ‘be careful what you ask for’ played out here because I was handed a text from the book of Job, and it is a rather dark text. I can handle dark but I like to see the light as well. I can accept the suffering of Friday and the waiting of Saturday, as long as I know that Sunday is coming - soon. But I could not see it in this text. I read a few chapters before and after but the hopeful message was not coming through for me. In a panic, I reached to Ed for help. Ed explained that “This is a Holy Saturday lived with the imprint and memory of Good Friday so close at hand that the possibility of Easter Sunday newness seems surely impossible” and that I didn’t have to generate hope from this text. And then he added “Does that help?” Well, yes, I guess it does. It helps to drive home to me yet again that suffering, waiting and hope do not come neatly in a package of a weekend. That one does not necessarily follow the other in neat, and quick, succession. Sometimes, suffering and hope happen simultaneously. And sometimes, when we are mired in the nothingness of waiting, it can feel as if it will last forever. The hope lies in the faith and trust that it will come to an end. Sometime. And until it does, we wait faithfully.

As dark as this text is, Job does ask God to “Set me a time and remember me!” He will wait for his renewal to come and he will answer when God calls. He *is* hopeful. He hopes that when death comes, God will grant him life. He asks God to remember his good deeds and not his sins. In the end, that is what we all hope, and wait, for, is it not?

*Dear God, help us to see, and feel, a glimpse of your light in our times of darkness.*

Esmeralda Cabral

**John 20:1-18**

**Easter Sunday, April 4**



### **Jesus and Mary in the Garden**

Susie’s picture is of Mary being really surprised and happy when she hears Jesus call her name. And it is of Jesus telling Mary to go and tell the disciples the Good News that “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

*Jesus, thank you for surprising us when we are sad and making us happy because you are alive and near.*

Susie