



HOPE TO CARRY ON

A Lenten Devotional Book for St. Paul's Episcopal Church

HOLDING ONTO HOPE

As I am sitting here writing this at the beginning of February, there are so many parts of my life where I need hope badly right now. Will I ever find another job? Will Daniel's care ever get easier? Will scenes of suffering in Gaza ever stop popping up on my Instagram or TikTok? Will this stupid sinus infection ever go away?

Merriam-Webster.Com defines hope as "to cherish a desire with anticipation; to want something to happen or be true." There are so many things that we want to be true in this world, and we look to God to fulfill those things. Some things are fulfilled because they fit into the Master Plan, and some things never get fulfilled because it may not be God's will or it may be something we want that would be detrimental for us to have. Still, we wait in anticipation because the future is full of possibilities.

As I pondered ideas for the Advent devotional book, the word "hope" popped into my head. When I got hit with COVID-19 in late September, plans for a devotional book were put on hold until Lent. The idea of "hope" fits into Lent as we are drawing close to Jesus and preparing for Easter. Jesus' death on the Cross means life for us, and that is a hope for which all of us long as Christians.

This Lent, we are looking at the epistle reading each week. Each reflection begins with a passage to read, usually a verse from that passage pertaining to hope, a short reflection, and a prayer at the end. Except for the weeks of Ash Wednesday and Holy Week, there are seven reflections on the same passage by different people. The name of this, "Hope to Carry On", comes from a song by the late Christian artist Rich Mullins which was covered by the band Caedmon's Call twenty-five years ago.

As always, we have a playlist of music centered around the theme for this year. You can find it at

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLwcuUWzmdmjdbgt813YtLkPTDP4fT0Rq>.

We wish you a blessed season of Lent.

-Jen McCabe

FEBRUARY 14 (ASH WEDNESDAY)

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

“As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”— 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

I usually love Lent and Ash Wednesday, but I am having a really hard time getting excited about them this year. As I am writing this reflection in late January, Lent feels more like an imposition than a season of spiritual preparation. Eating, for example, is already hard enough for me with food sensitivities, and the thought of having to restrict it even further on Ash Wednesday and Fridays during Lent (as is the practice of most of my friends) is not making me happy. Giving something up for Lent this year? Yeah, not happening. I’m already suffering enough with other things going on in my life. Taking something else on? Lord, I’m busy enough as it is!

It is probably a good thing that Lent is not about me. It is about growing close to Jesus, and that is a journey. There are going to be days when I make progress on that journey, and there are going to be other times when I feel like I cannot take another step. Today is the day of salvation because today we take that first step on that journey toward God. It might be just one step, or it might be a mile on the journey, and it gives me hope that God gives us credit for making progress on the journey no matter how small that distance is.

Lord, please help me to remember that you meet us where we are, not where we “should” be. Amen.

--Jen McCabe

FEBRUARY 15

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

“We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”— 2 Corinthians 5:20b

God is love, or so we’re told / God seeks us out, like precious gold / A lost little lamb, to
God we be / God won’t rest ‘til God finds us, She / And if we make a mess of life / God
sees right through our every strife / and though we hide our wounds from God / God finds

the effort so very odd / for the only desire of God for we / is to live with God in eternity / and though we may feel quite frail – at odds / we learn, regardless, that we are God’s.

“We entreat you – be reconciled to God!” The days at the start of Lent are short, the nights still long. I find it hard to whip up much enthusiasm for much of anything. And yet, when I open those sleepy little peepers of mine, I spy the light of One divine. “Be reconciled,” shouts Paul. Yes, I’m sure he’s shouting. I’m getting old and hard of hearing. “What’s that you say?” I ask of him. “Be reconciled to God, I said,” says he. In other words, God’s looking for me. God wants me. God expects me to come in for dinner. Of course! The street lights are on. That’s the sign to come home.

I come a-runnin’, or a-hobbling as the case may be. I come running, because I’ve got hope. It ain’t no wish. I’m hoping for a tasty meal. Dinner’s on, the bell’s a-ringin’, and God ain’t ne’er let me down yet. That gives me hope to carry on.

Lord God, I look to you when I cannot see. Show me your Light; illuminate my path. The way looks dark and scary, and my energy reserves are low, so I place myself in your hands. Filled with hope, I can now go. Amen.

-Fr. Keith Axberg

FEBRUARY 16

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Here is 2 Corinthians 5:20b, times three versions. Circle the words that jump out at you:

One: *We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.* (NIV)

Two: *We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* (RSV)

Now, three. This one makes my heart leap, then ache: *We’re speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God, he’s already a friend with you.* (Msg)

Reconcile: In Christ, we are restored to right relationship with God. God is the reconciler, we are the beneficiaries.

Is there anything more intertwined with hope than this idea of reconciliation? We hope for relationships to be reconciled. We hope our statement reconciles with the bank!

Sometimes we cannot accept something -- cannot reconcile it with what is good and just -- and hope for change.

Did you happen to circle either of the 'begging' words in the verses above? Implore. Beseech. In other places, this same word is translated as urge, beg, encourage, and plead. God's heart sounds very desperate here - God so desires that we have real hope (not as the world gives) and pleads with us to accept his friendship. We are reconciled because God really, really wants us. He doesn't begrudge the effort. You are wanted, beloved.

Lord, today we see that you hope. You hope that people will not put you off any longer. We pause to thank you for Jesus, who makes this possible and for the Spirit who pleads with our spirits to accept. We pause to consider how you pursue us and so desire things to be right between us. Please keep calling to those who resist: neighbors, family, ourselves. You have readied the path, help us to walk in it. Amen.
-Nicole Smith

FEBRUARY 17

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Having spent a few years in Iran, I got to know the works of the Sufi poet Rumi. My Farsi was never good enough to read his poetry in the original, but inasmuch as Farsi is celebrated as "the language of the nightingale," and knowing its beauty as a spoken language, I can only imagine its power. It is certainly beautiful as rendered in my mother tongue. There is a section of 2 Corinthians that reminds me of Rumi in both spirit and cadence: "...genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything." I think Rumi would have related to these dualities.

*Lord, grant me the wisdom and grace to live gracefully into the duality of the flesh and the spirit.
Amen.*

-Michael Boss

FEBRUARY 18

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-22

"In which he proclaimed to the spirit in prison" – 1 Peter 3:19

On Saturday, January 20, 2024, Carol Boss, Sandy McDougall, and I attended a mini OPOP, One Parish One Prisoner seminar at First United Methodist Church in Olympia, Washington with Chris Hoke, Alvin Shim, and members of their awesome and dedicated OPOP staff to facilitate the meeting. This was of interest to us as St. Paul's has sponsored Paul Fuentes and we wanted to hear and share information with other teams with dreams, hopes, stories, and ideas.

After a blessing from Rev. Jonathan Weldon, part of our morning session included a panel of men and women who had been released from prison and had been placed with an OPOP team. The OPOP teams were from different churches, mostly around the Olympia area and there was a lively question and answer with sharing their stories, heartaches, hopes, fears, and successes with lots of tears, laughter, and smiles. After a lunch of pizza, tacos, and salad, we settled down for an afternoon of sharing information with other teams, networking, and sharing updates from Chris and Alvin. An informative report from Candice Baughman let us know about criminal legal and policing bills being introduced in the Washington legislative this 2024 session.

Hope rippled around the room, hope for more inmates to find a team, hope for teams waiting for their new person to be able to start a new life, hope for reconciliation between the released and their families, and hope for "walking alongside just one neighbor leaving the tombs of incarceration".

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11) Amen.

-Mary Ann Taylor

FEBRUARY 19

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-22

“He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.” – 1 Peter 3:18b

The time of God appearing in burning bushes and pillars of fire was over. God now chose to reach out to his rebellious creatures in a way they could easily relate to. He took on their bodily form. Through it, he walked among them, lived and ate with them, spoke to and touched them. He lived out what he preached, hoping the people would understand and follow him, not just to be healed and fed, but to learn to heal and feed others. To his people, he gave hope for a better world. And then he was gone, a victim of hate, fear, and ignorance. But only the body was lost to his faithful followers. The Spirit was born as the body gave way. The Spirit was in the world, but not of it. It was present not in one body, but in all who took Jesus’s words into their hearts. His Spirit walked in the world with the faithful who continued his work after his ascension. It is still walking today, in the faithful who refuse to give way to the hate and fear mongers of this world, who refuse to give in to discouraging words. It enlivens those who persevere in living out Jesus’s teachings and ministries, sharing love and compassion with a distressed world, healing those who are hurt, and feeding those who are hungry. Knowing this gives me hope.

Gracious God, who has spoken to humanity across the ages and called us into a loving relationship with you, I give you thanks for your constant and faithful presence among us. Grant that I may be faithful to you and your vision of this life. In Jesus’s name, I pray. Amen.

-Carol Treston

FEBRUARY 20

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-22

As I work through the recent loss of my mother, I find myself weighed down with the more problematic parts of my relationship with her — and in so doing I find myself confronting my many personal failings and shortcomings. For this reason, the description of baptism as “not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God,” is particularly poignant.

Lord, Christ suffered once for sins. I find myself wondering how many times I might suffer for mine, and I hope I can be made alive in the Spirit. Amen.

-Michael Boss

FEBRUARY 21

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-22

“..and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”— 1 Peter 3:21-22 (NIV)

When my son Daniel was born prematurely in April 2009, my former husband Jon wanted to baptize him as soon as possible so he “would be OK” if something happened. I was in the throes of PTSD from Daniel’s traumatic birth as well as post-partum depression, and I was hedging out of terror that it would jinx him because of the events of the previous few days. My mother (who is not religious) was the tie-breaking vote, commenting that the baptism “[would be] a celebration of Daniel making it.” After acquiring some sterile water and a medicine cup from a NICU nurse, and borrowing some anointing oil from the hospital chaplain, we baptized Daniel in the NICU of Benefis East on April 10, 2009, with my mother, uncle, and a NICU nurse as witnesses. My best friend Rebecca, Jon’s best friend Justin, and Justin’s wife Dawn were named as godparents.

I do not believe for one minute that God would automatically send a 4-day old baby to hell for not being baptized in time, but I do believe baptism is important. It has been described as “an outward sign of an inward grace”, and I remember hearing endlessly at my Lutheran seminary about the importance of put[ting] on your daily baptism.” The author of 1 Peter is writing to persecuted churches and reminding them that they are saved because of their baptisms which get their saving power by the resurrection of Christ, as they were uniting themselves with Christ through these baptisms. As their baptisms saved them, my baptism at age 19 saves me, and Daniel’s baptism a few days after birth saves him. This salvation is hope for us.

Thank you, Lord, that our baptisms save us by your resurrection. Amen.

- Jen McCabe

FEBRUARY 22

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-22

“(Christ suffered) in order to bring you to God.” – 1 Peter 3:18

When I was a young lad, our family was visiting relatives in the Chicago area. One Wednesday night, our aunt, uncle, and cousins took my brother and me somewhere in Chicago. It was a scary, dilapidated part of town; an area no one in their right mind would drive through, let alone stop and park – at least not if you loved your life and/or family. Well, they found a place to park and we entered what could only be most charitably described as a falling-down fleabag dining room auditorium space. Hanging above a stand that seemed to function as a pulpit was a dusty old banner with JESUS (in red) on the left, a plain dark cross in the center, and SAVES (in red) on the right. Winos and derelicts of every sort and condition shuffled into the room. Some were there to enjoy the fan-blown air on a hot summer’s eve, others to get off the streets and into relatively safe space, and the rest for reasons known only to them.

At the appointed time, the preacher got up to preach, shared the “Plan of Salvation” with the people gathered, and in the fullness of time, invited folks to come forward for the laying on of hands and salvation. I didn’t step forward, for I was a young teen and did NOT want anyone in the family to think I hadn’t been saved, although I really didn’t know what that meant. But standing there in the quiet darkness of my own heart, I knew I wanted to be a child of God, and although I was too timid to move, I offered the sinners’ prayer.

Christ suffered to bring me to God. That gave me hope to carry on, deepening my faith, and, eventually, sharing that faith with others.

Dear God, I give you my pain, my ignorance, my ego, and all the things that keep us apart – you, me, and those who cross my path. Help me to make good choices, to be kind, and to live into the hope I have in you. Amen.

-Fr. Keith Axberg

FEBRUARY 23

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-22

“...when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.” – 1 Peter 3:20

When considering Noah’s ark, I think about sailing towards a particular port or destination. As sailors, we try to prepare for all eventualities - topping off drinking water and fuel supplies plus traveling with up-to-date maritime charts, life jackets, and proper foul weather gear. We enjoy having our first meal prepped and ready for reheating. Shep and I have sailed with our children, grandkids, friends, and, back in the day, our racing crew. We’ve even sailed with our pet cats.

Among all my memories, one stands out above all the others. We were sailing from the Everett Marina towards Hat (Gedney) Island and checking out everything on our fairly new sailboat. The day was lovely. Randy, one of Shep’s students, was aboard as our “deck ape” crew. Kelly, our young daughter, and Geoff, her tagalong 3 year old brother, were also aboard. Our children knew the drill. If they were anywhere other than the cabin, life jackets were required. So there we were - the sun was shining and we were kicking back and living the good life; the kids were below deck in the cabin. Suddenly Randy shouted that Geoff was overboard and Randy jumped in right after him into that very cold water. Suddenly, “man overboard” was no longer a safety drill. Shep managed to wrestle the boat around and we headed back the way we’d come.

When we reached them, Shep dealt with the tiller and our position while Randy lifted Geoff up to me and I got him on board. Then I hauled Randy up and out; the average water in Puget Sound averages somewhat under 50°F. Randy was a grown man and my ability to pull him on board is still something of a mystery. Did I mention neither Geoff nor Randy was wearing a life jacket? Did I mention a sailboat doesn’t spin on a dime? Did we realize that the kids would figure out how to climb up through the forward hatch and we wouldn’t notice? Let me tell you about ‘hope’ as we circled back to search for and retrieve Randy and Geoff. The time it took for the rescue still seems elongated - taking days, not minutes. Would we find them? Were they underwater? Were they alive? Hope, fear, and dread were my companions.

On this day, hope overcame all. This was a short afternoon sail - not a sail for 40 days. We had no menagerie, not even a kitty. We didn’t have to have enormous amounts of food on board. Yet I’m left with a glimmering of what that long-ago ark voyage was like and how it succeeded. I think I understand some of the worry and fretting that was present among all

the passengers. I know about desperately hoping and then discovering that 'hope' is a more faithful companion than 'fear' or 'dread.' Imperfect know-it-alls that we sometimes are, God lifts us up through hope and that's when we truly discover the 'good life.' I agree with Father Paul who said when "there's a rough spot on the sea, there's smoother sailing ahead."

Thank you for the hope that there is always smoother sailing ahead. Amen.

-Sue Shepherd

FEBRUARY 24

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-22

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit..."—1 Peter 3:18

The question that I have asked all of my reflection writers is "Where do you find hope in this passage?" I find hope in these words written by the author of 1 Peter to persecuted churches in Asia Minor, an area of modern-day Turkey. I'm a convert, so I appreciate these words to churches full of converts to Christianity.

Unlike some claims of evangelical Christians in the USA, these churches were facing active persecution where they faced loss of family, livelihood, and frequently their lives. The Roman emperor Nero blamed the Great Fire of Rome on Christians, according to the Roman historian Tacitus, and had Christians burned alive for it. These churches were living in scary times, and the reminder that Christ died for them to bring them to God would have given them a measure of hope. They would have known well how violent and horrible crucifixion was, and someone voluntarily suffering it on their behalf would have been a compelling act of love. Almost 2,000 years later, that act of love serves to bring me closer to God.

Thank you Jesus for suffering once for my sins. Amen.

-Jen McCabe

FEBRUARY 25

Read: Romans 4:13-25

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed. . .” – Romans 4:18

How many times in our lives have we faced trials and tribulations for which we have little or no hope? Once? Twice? More?

For me, many times.

For many years in my first marriage, I pleaded with the Lord: When will this abuse/addiction/adultery ever end? Do I forgive and forgive and forgive again? For how long? And at what cost? Until there is nothing left of me, or at least nothing recognizable?

Or do I risk a new life?

With little more than a pocketful of faith, I left my 28-year marriage with the clothes on my back and a few mementos, walking into the unknown.

Slowly, through prayer and counsel and reflection and time, I rose to the surface anew, raised to life again from the proverbial dead.

Did I do this alone? By no means! There were sisters, friends, and even strangers. Late night phone calls and time alone in nature. Tears and more tears before a hint of a smile (the laughter came later). And through it all, Christ.

“Without weakening his faith,” Abraham believed. Let it be so for all of us as we face insurmountable odds. May we be strengthened in our faith through our inevitable trials and tribulations—and give all the glory to God for seeing us through.

Dear Lord, in the midst of our troubled lives, thank you for shouldering our burdens. Soli Deo Gloria. Amen.

-Ashley E. Sweeney

FEBRUARY 26

Read: Romans 4:13-25

“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.” – Romans 4:16

Wow! I wonder how my Grandfather, a Pentecostal preacher, would have dealt with this passage. Since we lived half a continent apart, I only heard him preach a few times, and Jonathan Edwards’ sermon title, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” summarizes my recollection of his message. He often quoted John 14:6, “I am THE WAY and the truth and the life. NO ONE comes to the Father except through me.” It was THE WAY - and no other.

I grew up hearing and believing that message in a Christian home, and, mostly, a Christian small town. But Paul’s message in Romans tells a different story: Grace is guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring, including Greeks, and by extension Gentiles. . . .”He is the Father of us all.” Hmm. . . . Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, tribal cultures, those who are spiritual, but not religious? It sounds like Paul is saying that the answer is “YES,” if we have faith in God. Interactions with many people of various cultures and beliefs over the years have helped redefine my belief system. Many differences define our faith journeys, but our commonality far outweighs these differences.

So, Grandpa, you were right as far as your faith allowed you to go, and you were right in terms of my recognition of Jesus as the way for me. And I will continue to connect with my other brothers and sisters who are Abraham’s children as well!

Dear God, Grant us your wisdom and understanding to seek to know ALL of your children and their faith journeys. Amen.

-Cathey Frederick

FEBRUARY 27

Read: Romans 4:13-25

“In hope he [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, ‘So shall your descendants be’... That is why his faith was ‘reckoned to him as righteousness.’” -Romans 4:13-25

I am admittedly rolling my eyes at Abraham being this huge example of trust because he and Sarah gave her servant Hagar to him for him to impregnate instead of waiting for Sarah to conceive. Being the origin of the Ishmaelites through Hagar’s son Ishmael in addition to the Israelites through Sarah does make him the father of multiple nations, but it was probably not the way God intended it to happen. Did God work through Sarah’s womb and allow her to bear Issac? Yes, but shouldn’t Abraham have waited patiently for that to happen? Maybe. Not having a direct heir would have been a scary thing for him because of the idea of his line ending with him, and I can understand trying to hedge his bets a bit.

While he did try to hedge his bets by having the child with Hagar, he ***DID*** at least trust in his abilities to get ***SOMEONE*** pregnant and didn’t laugh at the angels as Sarah did. I think he trusted that God was going to provide him an heir, but he was fuzzy on the details. Unfortunately, I do the same thing. What gives me hope in this passage is that Abraham had a level of skepticism as I often do, and he is still held up as a great example of faith. There is hope for me yet.

Help us to trust in your providence, O God, even when we aren’t entirely sure how things will work.

Amen.

-Jen McCabe

FEBRUARY 28

Read: Romans 4:13-25

“(Abraham) grew strong in his faith ... being fully convinced God was able to perform what he promised.” – Romans 4:20b

I went to seminary wondering how and why God would bother “calling” me to do such a thing – to become a priest. I had prayed the “sinners’ prayer” years earlier; I had been baptized and confirmed; I had been a faithful church member for most of my young life, except for my time when I had to work Sundays as a police officer in Spokane. I’d paid my taxes and led a relatively moral life (“relative” being a key component to my self-understanding), yet I never felt genuine in my faith. I never felt holy. I knew the word “sin” meant to fall short of the mark, and I knew I’d fallen short of the mark in many areas of my life. So why on earth would God call me?

Then I went to seminary and caught sight of something I’d never really understood before, that our faith isn’t about what we say, do, or believe (although those are part of the story, to be sure); it is about the faithfulness of God. It is God who saves. It is God who heals. It is God who cleanses. It is God who washes. It is God who fills with the Spirit. Everything we say, do, and believe flows from God. God acts and we respond. God has taken the burden of our salvation, the burden of our calling, upon God’s Self. All we do is say, “Oh, OK. Thanks. Duh. Good to know!”

Abraham trusted God; that’s all God asked of him and all God asks of us. That has given me hope to carry on as a Duh-sciple.

Dear God, I know you will give me the strength I need to get through whatever comes my way this day and week. Thank you for being here always, and for always being here. It is your faithfulness that gives me hope. Amen.

-Fr. Keith Axberg

FEBRUARY 29

Read: Romans 4:13-25

“In hope he believed against hope...” – Romans 4:18a

Three of us from St. Paul’s went down to Olympia to attend an OPOP (One Parish One Prisoner) conference. There was a panel of men and women who had been in prison for years and were now out and thriving because of the OPOP ministry. They considered their OPOP team and its church as their new family. It struck me as I listened to their stories, their struggles, and their journey into faith, freedom, and healing, just how brave they had to be to reach out in faith to even apply to this program. Several of them said they have never in their lives had any adult ever believe in them or care anything about them. Some have families who still won’t have anything to do with them. No one had seen them as a person of worth. No one had ever acknowledged them as a child of God. But, each one took a leap of faith and reached out to this Christian-based program of people in hope that maybe this time it could be different. Our laws judge but not in mercy. They punish but don’t offer hope, training, or mental health. Yet these released prisoners, who had no reason to believe, are now active members of a faith community and healing from their many wounds.

Abraham never gave up, he kept his faith, “In hope he believed against hope”. These former prisoners and their OPOP team didn’t quit and didn’t lose faith even when many had rocky starts. Together in faith, we are reconciled.

Dearest Lord God, we thank you for reminding us of those in need who are in prisons of their mind, their body, and/or their circumstances. Help us to see every human being as a true child of God. Be with us, Lord, as we attempt to be conduits of your message of faith, hope, and love. Amen.

-Sandy

MARCH 1

Read: Romans 4:13-25

"He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body..." – Romans 4:19a

Abraham never would have made it in the "me" generation; he never believed in himself. He believed only in God. Abraham was sure he was too old and frail to accomplish anything like fathering "many nations." It would take a miracle for him just to have a son. But God promised to make him a father. Abraham didn't need to know the how, when, or why; he just had faith that it would happen because God had given His word. And it did.

Jesus often told his disciples not to worry about the how and the when of things, but to have faith in God. The One who bought all life into being, who made Abraham the father of many, would always be with them. When my own increasing frailties remind me that I'm not as strong or energetic as I used to be, I remind myself that there are still things I can do in service to God. If I am in tune with God's wishes, God will make them happen. I just have to be open, ready, and prepared for the surprises with which God often delights us. My frailties do not impede God's purpose.

Holy One, who brought all things into being, I place myself, body and soul, into your hands, knowing you will find work for me in the world, as you have found a place for me at your table. In Jesus's name, I pray. Amen.

-Carol Treston

MARCH 2

Read: Romans 4:13-25

"It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath." – Romans 4:14-15a

I find this to be particularly resonant in a fallen world in which we seem to rely more on justice than on forgiveness for our salvation.

Lord, may your loving kindness redeem our faith. Amen.

-Michael Boss

MARCH 3

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” – 1 Corinthians 1:25

In the course of my more than 70 years of dwelling in this veil of tears, I’m more convinced than ever of the foolishness of human wisdom. It saddens me that among the powerful and elite, the projection of strength has become the coin of the realm. I’d rather be a holy fool.

Lord, let me not be beguiled by worldly wisdom, but to prefer instead the “weakness” of God. Amen.

-Michael Boss

MARCH 4

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” – 1 Corinthians 1:18

When I saw that this passage was one of the epistles for Lent this year, I had to laugh because I knew what I would write about when my turn came up: my dad’s reaction to my conversion to Christianity.

My dad is not religious, and he pokes a lot of fun at the hypocrisy of a lot of religious people. I grew up seeing televangelists as the example of what Christianity was, and it took a lot of really positive contact with Christian people to change my heart and my attitude toward the faith. When I decided to become a Christian, I was a bit afraid of telling my dad. He and my mom were supportive of my decision for the most part, but there was definitely some shock

under the surface on his part, and I have taken more than a little bit of teasing about the decision I made. To his credit, he has tried to learn more about what I believe, but it still shocks him that his scientifically-trained daughter, who went to a hippie college, could embrace a belief system that seemingly eschews science and has some less-than-positive people as its public voice.

One of the things that I cannot make him or anyone else understand is the power of the Cross in my life, and why something so anti-scientific is so compelling to me. Blaise Pascal put it best when he said that “there is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made know through Jesus Christ.” The word “vacuum” gets rendered as “hole” in a lot of translations of that quote, and it really did feel like I had a God-shaped hole inside of me as I fought depression as a teenager and tried to make sense of my life. The almost 30 years since my conversion have not been easy ones, but I have survived because of the power of God and the love shown in Christ’s death on the Cross. That love changes my life daily, and I cannot imagine my life any other way. It is my hope to carry on.

Thank you, God, that you chose to reveal Yourself to me and love me enough to send your Son to die on the Cross. Amen.

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 5

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

“For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” – 1 Corinthians 1:18

I love the song that goes: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness...”

The power of God manifested through Christ by His death on the cross and His resurrection, is the center of our faith and hope, but to the world, it is utter nonsense.

What could there be that gives us more hope than the cross of Jesus Christ? When Jesus died He said, “It is finished!” Our reconciliation with God was completed in and through Christ.

God's ways are not the ways of man. God is not known or understood by reason as man knows it. A virgin birth? A resurrection? Of what use to the world was that? The Jews wanted a powerful warrior king to defeat the Romans, and the Greeks were fixated on wisdom. In their minds, Jesus fulfilled nothing. He was a failure. Today, mankind is no closer to seeing God's plan. Too many of us seem determined to have it our way or no way. But God had/has a better plan: His Son Jesus Christ who came to bring us hope and eternal life. With our hope set firmly in Christ, we can move day by day in the confidence that Christ has our back. We live each day in the assurance that is grounded in the finished redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

O Lord, we give you thanks for your plan of salvation. Let us not forget the sacrifice made on our behalf. Help us this day and every day to give you thanks for the hope you shine into our lives and let us look for opportunities to share that hope with others who see it as foolishness. Amen.

-Susan Sanderson

MARCH 6

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." – 1 Corinthians 1:20b-21

Something to remember when reading Paul's letters to churches is that each letter has a specific context and addresses specific problems. In the case of this particular letter, he addresses the conflict between the church and the surrounding community.

Are we all on the same page now? Good!

Corinth was a Greek church, so converts would have approached their faith from the perspective of acquiring wisdom. Paul is warning them that trying to reconcile the faith with the wisdom of the world is going to be problematic. The sayings of Jesus are countercultural in many ways, and we have that issue even today as we live in a capitalist society where the focus is on acquiring "stuff" and money.

Paul's words here give me hope because he mentions that the teachings of Christ seem like folly to the world and that God has effectively changed the rules of engagement. Instead of having a God we worship in the form of a statue or an oracle, we have a God who deigned to come down and be with us. How amazing is that!

Help us to understand your teachings that seem like folly and grant us wisdom for the things we face in our daily lives. Amen.

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 7

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

"[T]he cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." – 1 Corinthians 1:18

I am surrounded by crosses. There's a pyrographic cross I burned a few years ago that hangs above my retirement clock (so-called because it tells me what day of the week it is). I have several Cursillo crosses beside me, as well as some I crafted using wood from cottonwood branches that fell at a church I served in Montana – that broke when the wind blew – they remind me of our fallen nature. "Take up your cross," says Jesus. Beside the office door is yet another cross I inherited from my parents' estate when they passed away a few years ago. It hung in their living room for decades.

Crosses are iconic images for us who are alive in Christ. They are so commonplace we seldom give them any thought, but most of us can share stories behind every cross we own. For many people around us, friends, neighbors, celebrities, and athletes, the cross is simply jewelry; for Christians, though, it is a sign – perhaps the supreme sign – of our faith.

If Jesus had been gunned down, perhaps the symbol of our faith would be little gold AK-47s or AR-15s or a silver Saturday night special. Wouldn't that be shocking? Wouldn't that be horrible? Perhaps, if we understand that every man, woman, and child who is killed by firearms is as much a victim today as Jesus was in his day, we might carry these symbols as reminders that we kill Jesus and continue to kill him in so many ways with our own thoughts, words, and deeds.

The world sees violence as inevitable, and the use of violence as justifiable. We, as Christians, know better, or at least we ought to know better. It's not enough to just hang our crosses, wear them, or carry them. The cross is scandalous and foolish. We wear them and display them as a reminder that there IS another way. We don't carry on as victims; like Jesus, we carry on with a purpose: to bring life to all who hurt, and light to those who dwell in darkness.

Dear God, help me to be hope for others. Help me to help others discover that even when things are toughest, darkest, and scariest, You are there for them because I am there for them. Help me carry your cross, which I laughingly call "my" cross, in a way that brings life to others. Amen.

-Fr. Keith Axberg

MARCH 8

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." – 1 Corinthians 1:25

The imagined God of my childhood was strong and wise beyond comprehension. Learning the descriptors omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent helped place God in a far-off place removed from my everyday life. This God, somewhat like Santa Claus, knew when I was bad or good. So, mostly, I tried to be good.

Thankfully, I soon encountered believers in a personal God who loved me so much that God sent God's Son to die for my sins.

"Foolishness" is a polite translation of the Greek word that Paul used in his letter to the church in Corinth. The translation of the Greek word "fool" to English is "moron." God made what seems to many as a "moronic" choice to use the cross as a means of our salvation.

Not only did God eschew the rich and wise to carry God's message but chose a poor Jewish peasant who ate with sinners and prostitutes, healed the sick and lame, and preached by the sea and on the mountain. Could anything be further from the established ways of the world where power and wealth guarantee success?

Like the church in Corinth, there is disunity in Christianity today. Christian Nationalism, differences over the “worth” of women, immigrants, the poor, and the homeless divide us. God calls us, through Jesus Christ, to focus on God’s wisdom and strength, not our own.

Dear God, help us to recognize our limitations and weaknesses and rely on You and Your wisdom, strength, and guidance. Amen.

-Cathey Frederick

MARCH 9

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”—1 Corinthians 1:25

One of my favorite authors, Fr. James Martin, S.J. of America Magazine, has quoted this many times in articles:

Good news! 1.) God is in control. 2.) You are not God.

It makes me laugh, but it also brings to mind the fact that I am not responsible for fixing every issue in the world today. I cannot make Israel stop committing genocide in Gaza, nor can I make Russia withdraw from Ukraine. I cannot make both parties behave and pass appropriate legislation in Congress. I cannot change people’s hearts and make them stop engaging in systems of oppression.

But God can.

The verse at the top of the page brings me hope because it reminds us that God is so much stronger and wiser than we are.

Help us to remember that you are in control, God, and fix these things that are impossible for us. Amen.

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 10

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

“You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived” – Ephesians 2:1

Strong language. Question: was I really that bad? Answer: Well, yes, I have been guilty of seriously separating myself from the truth of being God’s child. It took me the first 26 years of my life to get around to commitment. What can be done for me, for anyone who stands outside? Ephesians said my off-course soul was correctable with no strings attached.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” – Ephesians 2:8

So how do we follow that? What comes next with God?

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” – Ephesians 2:10

Lent is, among other things, good and freeing news. If there’s something to “give up” in Lent, it might simply be any trace of negativity. Remember: God wants this time with each of us.

Dear God, thank you for the grace, love, and gifts of life. Amen.

-Tom Worrell

MARCH 11

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” – Ephesians 2:10

During the pandemic, I got addicted to videos from the YouTube channel, “The Pointe Shop”. The owner, Josephine Lee, does pointe shoe fittings for ballet students and visits studios and ballet schools across the country. My favorite series of hers is one where she meets with professional ballerinas at ballet companies attached to these schools (such as Pacific Northwest Ballet) and asks them about how they alter their pointe shoes. The

answers can be very brutal. Exacto knives, slamming them in doors, Jet glue, sewing with dental floss, and other things are involved. Each shoe is made on a specific form, and they don't come made into left and right models. Dancers have to sew their own and break them in before classes or shows. These shoes cost upwards of \$100 per pair, and some professionals can go through multiple pairs per show.

Unlike pointe shoe makers, we are not made on a specific form. We were created in Christ for good works, as the verse says at the top, and we were made for a specific purpose. God prepared us for this purpose, and each person's purpose is unique to them. It may sometimes feel like Exacto knives are being taken to our souls, but God is making us into the people needed for where we are placed in this world. Knowing that I was created for the place I am sitting is something that gives me hope.

Sustain us during those times when we are being molded for our place in this world, Lord, and remind us that we are Your workmanship. Amen.

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 12

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

For study, I try and wrap my brain around scripture word for word, thought for thought by reading a variety of translations. From there, I love to dip my toe into a paraphrase which is more of a conversational, devotional reading. In this vein, I find this paraphrase from The Message of the very familiar Ephesians 2:1-10 to be hope-filled and refreshing. So I offer it for quiet, devotional reading. What do you notice? Where does the Spirit show you hope?

It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin.

You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live.

You willed your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience.

We all did it,

all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat.

It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us.

Instead,

immense in mercy and with an incredible love,

he embraced us.

He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ.

He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus.

Saving is all his idea, and all his work.

All we do is trust him enough to let him do it.

It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

Lord, thank you that "Instead... you embraced us" and it's all you. Help me obediently join you in what you're up to. Amen.

-Nicole Smith

MARCH 13

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

“...he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.” -- Ephesians 2:4b-8

When I was a college student, I was sexually assaulted repeatedly by a person I trusted. Several years later, as I was once again peeling away the layers of that trauma, I kept getting this message from God that said He wanted me to be one of his disciples. NO! No, that can't be God. I remember crying and crying and saying, “Lord I am not worthy, I am a horrible person, I have done awful things.” Almost everyone who has experienced abuse tends to blame themselves to some extent. I was no different. I felt like I wasn't worthy because of what happened to me. It didn't matter that I hated it. It didn't matter that I had wanted to commit suicide, I was dirty.

I kept praying and crying and talking to God. I was driving down the freeway at the time. Suddenly, the radio came on. I have no idea how that happened because I was totally concentrating on my “conversation” with God. There was a pause and then I heard the song “Amazing Grace” by Judy Collins.

(<https://youtu.be/AtteRD5bBNQ?si=vwrWONuhEaa0Jlhi>)

I listened, my tears started to dry, and I said, “Okay God, okay. I get it, I will try.

I have no pain left over from that time. What I have is the GRACE God gave me with His message to me. It was transformative in my life.

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us your grace, your hope, your love. And with your help, we will attempt to be your hands and your feet and listen when you call. Amen.

-Sandy

MARCH 14

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...” – Ephesians 2:8

It’s funny how I never feel saved, and yet I simultaneously know that I am. My feelings come and go; they’re transient. The word of God lasts forever, however, and more especially the One who is the Word of God. My feelings come and go, and that’s OK. Feelings are real, but they don’t drive me. If they did, I’d often be dead in the water, or like a steam locomotive stuck on the tracks without steam. I had a friend explain to me one time that “faith is the locomotive, but feelings are the caboose. They’re all part of the train, but it’s the locomotive that provides the power, not the caboose.”

I have always found metaphors helpful in my faith journey. I get too confused when talking about theology or philosophy. I need concrete imagery. I realize that can sometimes cause problems. Every metaphor breaks down. It’s like thinking of God as Father; that’s great if one had a good father, as I did. But many don’t, and my Dad was far from perfect. But he did the best he could. God doesn’t try. God does. Pronouns don’t always work. I still use masculine pronouns, mostly out of habit, but strive to use feminine ones, too. The important thing for me is knowing that none of us gets God all that well (but “God gets us”). We do the best we can, and the lion’s share (another metaphor) of scripture reminds us that we’re all in God’s hands, anyway. That gives me hope to carry on in faith. It also helps when I get my caboose to church!

Dear God, help me to remember that my strength is not to be seen by my standing alone, but by standing in the middle of many, through whom I may better see my hope. Amen.

-Fr. Keith Axberg

MARCH 15

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” – Ephesians 2:8-10

I haven’t always identified as “Christian,” but I sure as heck identify as a sinner saved by grace. My born-again mother instilled that belief in me, and it’s a virtue for which I give thanks rather than take credit.

Lord, hold me in the faith that salvation depends less on my worthiness than upon your grace. Amen.
-Michael Boss

MARCH 16

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." – Ephesians 2:8-10

It is good to know that God has quickened me and that through his grace I am saved. We have all sinned, in some way, in the flesh. It is the way of the world that we live in.

I am very thankful that God has given me faith, through which I am saved, by his good work of grace.

Jesus Christ taught by example. He was always doing good works. Though it is not by doing these that we are saved, lest we boast. “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

Even in my most trying times, I remember this attitude and find comfort and hope in these words and many others in the Bible. “I yam what I yam.” In Popeye’s words. I need to live with that and make the most of it. And be happy.

Help us to live with who we are, ever drawing closer to you. Amen.

-Paul Lowe

MARCH 17 (ST. PATRICK'S DAY)

Read: Hebrews 5:5-10

“Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...” – Hebrews 5:8-9

When I saw this verse, I thought of this section of St. Patrick's Breastplate:

Christ with me,

Christ before me,

Christ behind me,

Christ in me,

Christ beneath me,

Christ above me,

Christ on my right,

Christ on my left,

Christ when I lie down,

Christ when I sit down,

Christ when I arise,

Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,

Christ in every eye that sees me,

Christ in every ear that hears me.

Christ suffered for all of us, and dying on the Cross means salvation. For me, that also means that Christ is with me in my day, and that gives me hope, especially when I am having a day where it seems like everything is going wrong.

Surround me, O God, and assure me of your presence. Amen.

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 18

Read: Hebrews 5:5-10

“So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee’ . . .” – Hebrews 5:5

Jesus became the perfect High Priest for all who obey Him. He offered prayers and pleadings to God with a loud cry and tears, and God heard Jesus’s prayers. So God designated Jesus as a priest forever. Jesus became our source of salvation and our hope forever.

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16) Amen.

-Barb Cheyney

MARCH 19

Read: Hebrews 5:5-10

“Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered . . .” – Hebrews 5:8

Humility is a quality we don’t hear about very often. To some, it sounds “weak.” It doesn’t satisfy their need for power, influence, or strength. Yet, through humble obedience, Jesus was “made perfect” and “became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” I don’t think there’s any power stronger than that.

“Obedience” is another unpopular word these days. Some believe that only the one who commands is strong; the one who obeys is weak. How many strong leaders have sacrificed

themselves for the benefit of humankind? More likely, they have thrown their followers under the proverbial bus to advance their own agendas. Yet Jesus was a leader who sacrificed himself for those who followed him. They were mainly the “losers” of the world: the poor, the disabled, lepers, tax collectors, shepherds, slaves, even women. Why would he throw away his life for them? Maybe because he saw God’s image in each one, and because they were precisely the ones he came to set free.

Today’s world seems to demand a choice from us. We can line up behind leaders of this world and pin our hopes on the temporarily powerful people, newsmakers, and “influencers.” Or we can follow the humble, obedient Jesus and live the life God has envisioned for us, one where we love our enemies, comfort the brokenhearted, and welcome the stranger. I will pin my hopes on the obedient Son, the humble leader, Jesus the Christ.

Gracious God, who saw the suffering of the world and sent salvation in the form of your Son, keep me mindful of those in need and open my heart to humble obedience to your will. In Jesus’s name, I pray. Amen.

-Carol Treston

MARCH 20

Read: Hebrews 5:5-10

“...being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchiz’edek.” – Hebrews 5:10

So who is Melchizedek, other than a guy whose name gets butchered badly by lectors? Let’s talk.

His name, by the way, is pronounced: “Mel-kih-zeh-dek”. The “ch” is a guttural “k” sound in Hebrew.

“Melchizedek” literally means “king of righteousness”. The name comes from the Hebrew words “melek” (king) and “tzedek” (righteousness). We first meet him in Genesis 14 on the way back from rescuing Abraham’s nephew Lot from some kings who kidnapped him. He brought out bread and wine (how familiar!) and blesses Abraham. The author of Genesis

tells him that he is the king of Salem, which means “peace”, and “the priest of God most high” (v.18).

We hear about him again in Psalm 110 which is a psalm of David for “God’s priest-king”. Verse 4 has God speaking to this priest-king, telling him that “[he is] a priest for ever after the order of Melchiz’edek” and mentions that God “has sworn and will not change his mind.” This is the passage quoted by the author of Hebrews, and Jewish believers would understand that the psalm is written regarding the Messiah.

This has significance for us as Christians because Jesus is that King of Righteousness for us. Him being a high priest means that he could offer sacrifices for the expiation of sins, and the sacrifice he offered was his own life. This sacrifice covered our sins so we would not face judgment or death for them. This is our hope.

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen. (p.101)

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 21

Read: Hebrews 5:5-10

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications . . .” – Hebrews 5:7a

I am not a pray-er (one who prays). That is, I am not much given to praying. At least not in the conventional sense. I struggle to keep my mind clear and quiet, so times of praying are, for me, a struggle. I enjoy the Lord’s Prayer, of course. I love the prayers and collects of our liturgy. I thank God that people have collected these wonderful, deep, theologically sound, and astute prayers over the years.

I find them helpful. I love that there are words I can use when I have no words of my own. I have prayed, of course. I do pray. But they never feel adequate. A friend of mine died the other day. He lived in another part of the country, so we hadn’t seen one another in several decades. But we stayed in touch via social media. He suffered from a wide variety of

ailments, both physical and mental. But he never gave up on life. Every day was a new day for him. “Once more into the breach,” he would say. His life was a prayer, as much as his words.

Anything I had to say to his friends and family paled in comparison to what my heart was saying, feeling, thinking, wanting. What comforts me, though, is that God knows our hearts and minds. What’s more, Jesus continues to offer up prayers and supplications for us and on our behalf. I don’t think that was just “in the days of his flesh.” I think that’s true in the here and now, and that is one of the things that gives me hope to carry on. My desire is for my life to be the prayer my mouth wants to share.

Dear God, help me to live my life with dignity and respect. Help me to honor those who have gone before. Help me not to just find hope and love, but to be a living example of hope and love – both of which I have in You. Amen.

-Fr. Keith Axberg

MARCH 22

Read: Hebrews 5:5-10

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” – Hebrews 5:7

I am not a morning person. I know, I know. The rest of the world is, or so it seems to us non-morning persons. Early morning texts and phone calls. Knocks at the door. And me, still in my robe.

As early as high school, and continuing through college, I never started studying until 11 p.m. and often stayed awake past 2 a.m. Night owls, we’re called, those of us who thrive in the dark. Not surprisingly, I do my best writing late at night, too, cocooned at my desk with only owls and my imagination as company.

Night is also my unfettered prayer time. Because there is nowhere to go (except to bed), I linger over nightly prayers. Now that I have returned to the Roman Catholic Church, I have added the Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola to my nighttime ritual:

- Give Thanksgiving
- Ask for the Spirit
- Review and Recognize Failures
- Ask for Forgiveness and Healing
- Pray about the Next Day

However we pray, we are called to pray without ceasing, and, although I fail miserably at this, I try to frame my days—and nights—with a prayerful heart. Jesus’s example in this passage reminds us that all our prayers—whether offered day or night—are heard (. . . and he was heard because of his reverent submission.)

And that sends chills up my spine. The Lord hears us.

Hear our prayers, O Lord. Amen.

-Ashley E. Sweeney

MARCH 23

Read: Hebrews 5:5-10

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear.” – Hebrews 5:7

Being a night owl, I find myself needing a snack around midnight to fall asleep, and I usually end up reading a book while I eat as a reward for getting through the day to that point. I am currently reading the *Discworld* series by Sir Terry Pratchett to try and enhance my geek cred, and I finished the book, Small Gods, last night. In it, Pratchett satirizes religion in general, creating this fictitious city called Omnia which worships the Great God Om in various forms and has an elaborate hierarchy and a “Quisition” to punish people who commit faith transgressions. The irony is that people are practicing the religion but not actually *believing* in it, so Om, in reality, is in the form of a tortoise in most of the book due to the lack of true believers. One of the things we learn about the elaborate pantheons of deities on the Discworld is that gods/goddesses depend on believers as a fuel of sorts. Omnia has this underground cult of belief in the world not being a sphere circling a sun, but

instead, a disc balanced on the back of a giant turtle named Great A'Tuin who is swimming through space, which is how things actually are, and this causes members of this underground movement to run afoul of the Quisition. As a persecuted minority, the way they gain entry into these secret meetings is the passphrase “the turtle moves.”

As I was lying in bed finishing the book at a somewhat ungodly hour, this week’s epistle reading popped into my head, and I started pondering how it fits into the ideas in the book. Verse 7 tells us that “Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears” and that would probably mark him as an actual believer versus someone who is just practicing the faith in the way of most Omnians in the book. As Christians, we believe that God hears our prayers, and our prayer is actual conversation with God instead of just something we do because we probably should. That we can have these conversations with God through prayer gives me hope because I need to know that the One to whom I am crying out in fear, anger, or joy actually hears me and cares about what I am saying.

Thank you, God, that you hear us and desire a relationship with us. Amen.

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 24 (PALM SUNDAY)

Read: Philippians 2:5-11

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...”—Philippians 2:5

Philippians 2 is partly a description of how we are to engage in our relationships as Jesus followers. Verse 5 tells us to have “this mind,” referring back to the mind described in verses 1-4 (unity in love and mind; unselfish; humble, realistic view of self, giving, outward focusing) and forward to the perfect mind of Christ in verses 6-11 (sacrificially giving, servant, radical humility). Truly, this call to radical humility is about as counterintuitive and countercultural as it comes!

I wonder what our Lenten theme - hope - means in this context. I find these verses to be beautiful, but daunting and not very hopeful implementation-wise to my human mind. This Jesus brand of humility is far beyond my reach and I can feel defeated! The minute I **try** to be more humble, I am **less** humble because my mind starts thinking of myself, my own abilities, my importance, or significant lack thereof! Me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me! My

only hope, as is my usual lesson, is in the Spirit developing “this mind” in me. Even when I seek God, my ridiculous self-reliance rears its less-than-humble head!

Lord, you don't turn away from my selfish places, but you are also not satisfied to leave them be, thank you for insisting on growth even when I quake at your call. I need your wisdom to know what your mind of humility looks like in my relationship with others, and your Spirit to make it possible. Amen.

-Nicole Smith

MARCH 25

Read: Hebrews 9:11-15

“The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” – Hebrews 9:13-14

Outwardly clean. Good enough for government work. Shiny and new on the outside.

OOOF. How much that reflects our society today. As long as it looks good, it must be fine. But it doesn't take much to scratch the surface to see that facade fall away and the true self underneath. It makes me think of buying a used car. It has been detailed and polished, but the engine may be old and failing and it won't take us very far.

But we are cleansed not by the blood of goats and bulls but by the blood of Jesus through and through so that under the surface our true selves shine. And therein lies our HOPE. But it is easy to be blinded by the shiny externals and lose sight of our true selves in Christ. Daily we need to renew ourselves in Him. We must look beyond our worldly wants and needs, shed the outward facade, and open our hearts and minds to Him. Easy? Not always. Worth it? Yes.

Father God, you have cleansed us and made us whole through your Son, our Savior Jesus. Help us to look to you daily with the help of your Holy Spirit that we may be your hands and feet bringing your hope to the world. Amen.

-Susan Sanderson

MARCH 26

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” – 1 Corinthians 1:19

In this passage, Paul again reminds the Christians in Corinth that they live in an upside-down world. He revisits a 700 year old message from Isaiah 29:14: “The wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” This is not the way of the world. The Corinthians, and Christians today, need continual reminders of this truth.

The ministry of Jesus was to those who were poor and had little or no power. The “wise and powerful” Jews and Romans felt threatened by his message and ultimately killed him. After he rose from the dead, his followers continued to spread the good news that God loves us all, even the poor, oppressed, and persecuted. Spreading this message often brought them into conflict with those in power, both in the government and in the church.

In John 18:36 and elsewhere throughout the Gospels, Jesus reminds us that His kingdom is not of this world. He did not come to seek power and to be an earthly king. As followers of Christ, we are called to a kingdom of love and fellowship with God - not power and wealth.

Dear God, Help us to find our place in this upside-down world. Fill us with an understanding of our call to be both recipients of and participants in healing and restoring the world. Amen.

-Cathey Frederick

MARCH 27

Read: Hebrews 12:1-3

“... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith ...” – Hebrews 12:1b

I don't run. If I was on a trail and happened upon a hungry grizzly bear or mountain lion, I'd simply say grace and let them have at me. Oh, I'm sure I'd put up a fight. But run? No. No more. I never cared for running, even when I was young, hail, and hearty. I never reached the point in runnin' where the endorphins would kick in (along with that mythical euphoria

runners talk about). Not me. I found that if I ran to my destination, by the time it took me to catch my breath, I could have gotten there at a walk without the heavy breathing!

Well, the author of Hebrews seems to have a runner's heart. More power to him. I don't think his point is the speed with which one "runs," but with having one's attention on the journey itself. I can get behind that. I like the image of Jesus, first of all, as the pioneer. He is the trailblazer, not me. Nothing I do is new. It may be new to me, but not to God, so I simply need to follow the trail that's been set by God's holy ones.

Secondly, Jesus is the perfecter of our faith. Yes, I fall short. I always have; I always will. That doesn't mean I should give up or not try. We do the best we can, knowing that when we get to the register and cash in our chips, Jesus covers any shortfall with his own Holy Debit Card. Removing our burdens like that, Jesus gives me the hope I need to carry on. He sweated it so I don't have to. That's what's running through my mind as we head towards Easter, anyway.

Dear God, help me embrace the hope that is set before me by your Son, Jesus, so that I can nourish and grow in faith and love of You and your Creation. Amen.

-Fr. Keith Axberg

MARCH 28 (MAUNDY THURSDAY)

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" — 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

Most of us hear these words (or at least similar ones) every Sunday when we come to worship. Those of us who have been Episcopalian for a while could probably recite them in our sleep. We will commemorate the institution of the Eucharist tonight during Maundy Thursday worship, take the Eucharist, and then we will read Psalm 22 as we strip the altar. We go from celebration to solemnity in a matter of minutes.

As much as it would probably seem like we are having an ecclesiastical mood swing, this is what happened almost 2000 years ago tonight. Jesus and his twelve closest friends got together to celebrate the Passover seder, then they headed to Gethsemane, where he prayed in the garden, begging God to not make him go through with the crucifixion. As important as it is that we celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday, it is equally important that we remember this time every year because we are remembering that Jesus is fully human in addition to being fully divine. His fully human side did not want to go through a horrifically painful death alone. It gives me hope in those times when I am terrified about what is coming next to know that Jesus went through it too. It gives me hope to know that Jesus praying those agonizing prayers brought him to a place of acceptance, something that I would hope to find as well.

Gracious God, be with us in those times when we are terrified of what is coming next. Help us to remember that Jesus also had those times of fear, one of them right after he had a time of celebration with his friends. Amen.

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 29 (GOOD FRIDAY)

Read: Hebrews 10:16-25

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful...” – Hebrews 10:23

My plans for New Year’s Eve 2023 involved putting my bullet journal together and watching TikTok or YouTube videos. Instead of doing that, I spent the evening crying after finding out that Julie, one of my “Montana moms” had passed away. She had been one of the people I was closest to during my former husband Jon’s pastorate in Montana, and she was one of the people who dropped everything to make sure Jon and I were cared for when Daniel was born prematurely. She and her husband John were at the hospital with me the day after Daniel was born when I was trying to come to terms with his birth and the trauma of what had happened. When another parishioner decided to call me and yell at me for daring to go home from the hospital for a night to gather my wits after spending six days inpatient because I almost died, Julie was one of the people who rose to my defense and kept that person from getting near me until Daniel was finally able to come home two

months later. I haven't been able to return to Montana since I moved away almost 14 years ago, but Julie and I kept in touch over Facebook, email, and through cards. Her passing hit me hard, and I am a month into coping with my grief as I am writing this. Unless you happened to see my Facebook post on New Year's Eve asking for prayer for her family, you would not know that I am dealing with this because I have been grieving very quietly.

The epistle reading for today, Hebrews 10:16-25 talks about how God remembers our sin no more and exhorts us to spur each other on to good works and not neglect to meet together... but verse 23 was what stood out to me as I thought about what brings me hope from the passage. I have talked in past Good Friday pieces since 2018 about how the Cross is our good news, how this is where the rubber meets the road in terms of my faith, that all is lost if I do not believe that Jesus dying on the Cross meant that death is not the final answer, and I am here to tell you that I still need people to remind me of all of these things. I need the reminder that God is faithful and that I will see Julie again. I need the reminder that God's Son died on Good Friday, and this means that our God understands grief. In the meantime, I am clinging to the hope that the spasms of grief that pop up at inopportune times are going to subside one of these days.

Lord Jesus Christ, by your death you took away the sting of death: Grant to us your servants so to follow in faith where you have led the way, that we may at length fall asleep peacefully in you and wake up in your likeness; for your tender mercies' sake. Amen. (BCP, p. 504)

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 30 (HOLY SATURDAY)

Read: 1 Peter 4:1-8

"The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins." – 1 Peter 4:7-8

It is Holy Saturday today, and I am headed to a Celebration of Life. Julie, who I told you about yesterday, is originally from Everett, and her family organized a Celebration of Life here in Washington so that non-Montana folks could get together and talk about her. I am admittedly a bit nervous because it has been 14 years since I have seen Julie's husband John, I have met her daughter only once, and I am shy at times like this.

The irony of the Celebration of Life being on Holy Saturday is not lost on me. Holy Saturday is the day when Jesus was in the tomb, and nobody outside of heaven knew that the resurrection was about to happen. Having a Celebration of Life today is a foretaste of what we will experience tonight at Easter Vigil: the surprising news that Christ is no longer in the tomb and hope is alive.

The end of all things **IS** at hand—the end of how things used to be. We know now that Christ will rise from the dead and death will no longer be final... but we do not officially know that yet, so we will still spend today quiet and remembering that day almost 2,000 years ago when it seemed like hope was gone.

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, p. 283)

-Jen McCabe

MARCH 31 (EASTER SUNDAY)

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

“Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain.” – 1 Corinthians 15:1-2

Funerals are important for many reasons, but one of the biggest is that they give us a chance to take the major memories of a lost loved one, celebrate them, put them in a box with a bow, and set them on a prominent shelf in our souls. Those memories keep them alive in our hearts and in our communities.

In this passage, St. Paul reminds the Corinthians to remember what they have been told. Paul has proclaimed to them a series of stories, memories of one who was no longer in this earthly physical life. He urges them to remember, but in this case, it's a little bit more than just keeping someone precious alive in our hearts and communities. They have found that in remembering these stories, the one who they lost is present in unexpected ways, life-giving ways, even what some would call miraculous ways. So powerful are these stories that even those who had never met him in life find that he is with them.

Easter is the great celebration of the amazing power of the story of Jesus, his teaching, his miracles, his self-giving, his death and resurrection. That resurrection lives on in those of us who, like the Corinthians, find that in recalling his stories we find that he is with us again in unexpected ways that are life-giving, even miraculous.

Loving God, this Easter day, we thank you for the gift of life you gave us in your son, Jesus Christ. May the telling of his story continue to transform us, our community and our world. We ask this in his own name, just as he taught us to do. Amen.

-Fr. Paul Moore

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The cover picture was taken by John Towner and depicts the Avenue of the Giants in California. I sourced the picture from Unsplash.Com.

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Sandy is the reason we have a YouTube playlist this year. She graciously provided me with the lion's share of the songs on there, and I appreciate her sharing her gifts with me.

May you have a blessed Easter. He is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Blessings to you all.

-Jen McCabe