



2020 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

*Taken from the 2019
Devotional*

The Presbyterian Church of Upper Montclair

www.pcum.org

Introductory Letter

Hey there, my beloved sibling in Christ,

As we all sit together in this time of unknown and uncertainty, it was requested that the Christian Education Committee re-release the 2019 Lenten Devotional. This devotional is exactly the same as last year, except the dates have been updated.

My hope this year is that by engaging with the various voices from the PCUM church family, you will find connection with one another in a deep and meaningful way. If you read through the devotional last year, the Holy Spirit can and does show us new things each time we read a familiar text. As we remain apart for the foreseeable future, remember that your church family and your church leaders are praying for you and your family during this time.

This Lenten Devotional has one daily devotional every day in Lent. All the contributors of this devotional were given a selection of two different scripture passages (from the Revised Common Daily Lectionary) to choose from. Then they were instructed to create their devotion in whatever way they felt lead. This means that all the entries will be a little, or a lot, different.

There are also guided readings throughout this devotion and various spiritual practices. Both techniques have been used for centuries to engage with and explore themes in Scripture, especially with passages that are confusing or difficult to understand. Origen, one of the ancient church fathers, said that every biblical passage can be looked at in three different ways: the literal meaning of the text (it means exactly what it says); the ethical meaning of the text (how it applies to our lives); and the allegorical meaning (what is the moral hidden meaning).¹ If a text is hard to understand in a literal way, perhaps try looking at it metaphorically or allegorically.

Each day will have the full Bible passage listed at the top of the page and an excerpt to read from this text, too. I invite you to read the whole text before reading/engaging with the days' devotion. Most of the quoted Scriptural text is from the NRSV translation. This is the same as the Pew Bibles. If it is another translation, there will be a note telling you which translation is printed (most often it is either the CEB—Common English Bible—or the NIV—New International Version.)

It is my hope and prayer that as you journey through this Lenten devotional that God speaks to you through what others have shared and that your heart is prepared for the great and wonderful news on Easter morning—that the tomb is empty, and Christ is Risen.

In Christ,

Pastor Katherine

¹ Origen uses the terms “bodily/somatic” sense, “soulish/psychic” sense, and “spiritual” sense. This website explains the three levels clearly and concisely: <https://etimasthe.com/2017/09/20/the-three-levels-of-interpretation-of-scripture/>

Wednesday, February 26: Psalm 51:1-17

A Clean Heart, A New Spirit

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

- Psalm 51:10 and 12

The creators of the Revised Common Lectionary, which is the way that all the scriptures for this daily Lenten devotional were selected, open the Lenten season on a very introspect note. In this Psalm, I have always been drawn to verses 10-12. The psalmist is asking God to remake their heart and to give them a brand-new spirit.

The beauty, to me, is this is what Lent is for. Lent is for taking a special time apart (46 days to be exact) and using it to actively pursue a change in heart and a change in spirit. Many years I do this by giving up something and adding in something else. Last year, I gave up cheese (definitely the hardest one yet) and I added a new daily prayer ritual.

As we enter into this sacred time set aside to prepare ourselves for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, my prayer is that you're able set aside time every day to delve into a conversation with God, by the devotion and with sacred silence, even if it's only 5 minutes total. May God use this sacred portion of the church calendar to create a clean heart within you, within me, within the entire PCUM community.

Prayer: Holy God, you have already made me brand-new. This psalmist's plea is already accomplished. Help me to feel more and more the truth of my new heart and right spirit. Help me to return to your loving arms continually. Thank you for loving me and for creating me. In Jesus' lovely name, Amen.

Pastor Katherine Scott-Kirschner is so grateful for all the contributors to this Lenten devotional. She is also hopeful that you, the reader, will be filled with the Spirit's presence, Christ's love, and God's grace as you journey through Lent with this devotional.



Thursday, February 27: Exodus 5:10-23

Who's to Blame?

“Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me?’”

-Exodus 5:22

The people of Israel had just welcomed Moses and Aaron into their midst, initially believing the good news that God intended to free them from Egypt, where they lived in slavery. But the first confrontation between Pharaoh and Moses brings about disastrous results for the slaves, as Pharaoh dramatically increases their workload and they end up suffering the cruel consequences of not being able to meet the new demands.

The people confront Pharaoh first, but (unsurprisingly) he is unmoved, so they quickly turn to Moses and Aaron, blaming them for stirring up trouble. Reading this, I think can see why the people would blame them, and not Pharaoh, but— isn't Pharaoh the bad guy here? Then Moses in turn blames God for these consequences.

In times of crisis I think we are sometimes also guilty of blaming God for the difficulties we face. Why do we do this? What sort of understanding of God does this reflect? Is it actually something positive – we trust that ultimately God is in control of everything? Or does it reflect a lack of trust in God?

Prayer: Lord, it is difficult to see your loving presence at work when life is hard. Give us the faith to continue searching for your will, and fill us with hope and knowledge of your grace. Amen.

Millie Tourelot is a Ruling Elder currently on Session. She is a member of the Christian Education committee. She, and her husband Max, have two daughters: Arden and Clarissa.



Friday, February 28: Exodus 6:1-13

Supreme Confidence

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country." (NIV)

- Exodus 6:10-11

I have a vivacious and embracing Jewish friend named Susan who for many years has invited me to her Passover Seder, the meal that three of the Gospel writers say was observed by Jesus and his apostles during the last supper. As part of the Seder Susan's eclectic guests take turns reading aloud from a Passover guidebook called the Haggadah, which tells the story of the exodus of the Jewish slaves from Egypt. In the version Susan uses there are poems and readings interspersed with scripture. Among the many meaningful portions of Susan's Haggadah, is one that leads all at her table to sing a few lines of the African-American spiritual that reflects the verses from Exodus:

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land.
Tell ol' Pharaoh,
Let my people go.

God is telling Moses to speak truth to power. That was as scary a command in ancient Egypt as it is today, in essence giving the boss-of-you instructions beyond your pay grade. And yet, when we consider God's promises, when He calls us to stand up against the mighty, we should be confident. We should not fear. We should look all around and see where injustice is and speak, act, protect, and when necessary demand.

Granted, I am not great at any of these behaviors. But when I am at my most confident, it is because I am reminded of those who are like Moses: Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte; M.L.K.; the first responders on 9/11; the founders of the Innocence Project; the subway rider who without hesitation gives money to a beggar; the hungry people we serve at the 7th Street Bistro in Newark who bow their heads and give thanks before they eat. Each has taken a stand against Pharaoh. And I strive to stand with them.

Prayer: Great God, guide me on the way to speak truth to power. Give me the courage to speak when I would rather be silent. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Diana Stewart de Perkins is a Ruling Elder currently on Session and is on the Mission and Service Committee. She is often seen in the very back of PCUM's sanctuary with her husband, Eric.



Saturday, February 29: Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

The Spiritual Practice of Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a three step Scripture reading practice. The first time you read the text, read the text slowly with the goal of taking in what the base meaning, arch, or story of the text is.

Then pause and give yourself a couple minutes to reflect on the text you just read. Is there anything that really stood out to you? Let the Spirit move as you reflect upon the text.

Read the text again. This time notice what word or phrase really sticks out to you or stays with you. After you finish the passage, reflect on what that word or phrase means in your life today for a few minutes.

Finally, read the passage a third time, this time as a prayer or conversation with God. When you are done, give space for God to respond to this prayer before ending with prayer provided with this devotional.

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 (CEB)

¹ Living in the Most High's shelter,
camping in the Almighty's shade,
² I say to the LORD, "You are my refuge, my stronghold!
You are my God—the one I trust!"

Because you've made the LORD my refuge,
the Most High, your place of residence—
¹⁰ no evil will happen to you;
no disease will come close to your tent.
¹¹ Because he will order his messengers to help you,
to protect you wherever you go.
¹² They will carry you with their own hands
so you don't bruise your foot on a stone.
¹³ You'll march on top of lions and vipers;
you'll trample young lions and serpents underfoot.
¹⁴ God says, "Because you are devoted to me,
I'll rescue you.
I'll protect you because you know my name.
¹⁵ Whenever you cry out to me, I'll answer.
I'll be with you in troubling times.
I'll save you and glorify you.
¹⁶ I'll fill you full with old age.
I'll show you my salvation."

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for the psalms that speak deep truth and emotion into my life. Thank you for keeping watch over me as a shepherd keeps watch of her or his flock. Thank you for loving me freely and ever so completely. By the power of your Spirit, help my life reflect your love to the world. Amen.



Sunday, March 1: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

My First Fruits

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

- Deut. 26:1-2 (NRSV)

As a little girl, I loved going to church. I know, what a shocker! A person who is eventually called to be a pastor loved going to church. This is not the case with every pastor out there, but for me, personally, I loved going to church.

At the church where my family attended, there was a special “children’s church.” We had Sunday School for one hour and “children’s church” while the adults had worship in “big church”. I don’t remember all the things we did during our special church service, but I do remember that we sang, listened to a bible story, had a lesson, and took up an offering in this service. Many weeks before I walked into my Sunday school classroom, I would ask my mom or dad for a dollar to give during the offering.

In my own way, I was giving of my first fruits. Was the money my money. No. It wasn’t. But I did want to contribute to the kid’s offering. I wanted to thank God for what God had been doing in my life—giving me a community, a family, a school, etc—by giving something, anything during the offering at children’s church. On the random days that I went to worship with my parents, I would ask to place the envelope in the basket.

For me, my “first fruit” as a small child was just participating and recognizing that God was a big part of my life. Has this been part of your life, your faith journey, too? Have you felt so grateful or excited or rejoicing that you give God some of your first fruit-- be it thought, time, money, or abilities? Could there be a way that God is leading you to give back of your first fruits?

Prayer: God of all blessings, thank you for providing opportunities to give back. Help me to notice and respond when these opportunities appear so that I can connect more with you, O God, and my neighbors all around me. Amen.

Pastor Katherine Scott-Kirschner was raised Presbyterian in Bakersfield, CA. The congregation she was part of was affectionately called “The Big Pink Church” because it was a rather large building and all of the stucco was a light, baby pink.



Monday, March 2: 1 John 2:1-6

Where Are You Called?

*This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.
-1 John 2:5b-6 (NIV)*

In this season of atonement, we are reminded of both the great sacrifice made to free us from our sins as well as the call to live a life faithful to God's commands. Rather than turning our backs on God, we are commanded to love God and experience completely the transforming love of God in and through us. Each prayer, each choice we make, can bring us closer to the divine path set out for us, following the way of Jesus. It is both daunting and exciting to live in him as he lives in us. Knowing this, I still find it very hard to stay focused on God's will and live according to his rules. The daily demands of work and family become a series of tasks rather than precious opportunities to reflect God's love. Easter comes just when I need it most, to jolt my complacency and replace it with wonder, hope and renewal.

Prayer: Lord, not on my terms but on yours, I come with humility to ask for forgiveness and guidance on how to live a life transformed daily by your abiding love. Help me to turn toward you at all times, even when the way is not clear and things of this world distract me from recognizing your claim on my life. In Jesus name, amen.

Nadine Pearce and her husband Alan Jones have two children, Trevor and Grace, who both grow up as part of PCUM's community.



Tuesday, March 3: Zechariah 3:1-10

Under the Fig Tree

“On that day, says the LORD of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree.”

- Zechariah 3:10



Image: a fig tree to come under and find shade. Perhaps even reconciliation.

What does a place of unity or reconciliation look like to you? Does it look like a playground, a backyard, a board room, a sanctuary, a car? Does it even look possible?

For the prophet Zechariah, the space under a fig tree looked like a good place for reconciliation and a restoration of unity.

Prayer: Amazing God, show me the people I need to reach out to meet under my own kind of fig tree. Show me the places in my life where I need your love and your light to shine through. In Christ's name, Amen.



Wednesday, March 4: Luke 21:34-22:6

Earworm

“And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to [Jesus teach] in the temple.”
- Luke 21:38

I have never been an avid reader of poetry...strange for a former English teacher, I know. But song lyrics are different. I will listen to lyrics and sing them thousands of times, over and over, and still be astonished when I hear something new in them. Ages ago when Judy Collins introduced the poet Leonard Cohen at a concert in Central Park, I confess I wasn't very impressed. But years later when I heard Cohen's song *Anthem* sung by two female vocalists I was overwhelmed by the lyrics. I heard the words with my heart and they became a very persistent earworm for me...

“The birds they sang at the break of day/Start again I heard them say/Don't dwell on what has passed away/Or what is yet to be.” What a perfect invitation this is to encounter God new each day without emotional baggage or anxiety. It is an invitation to experience him not as the “I was” or the “I will be”, but in the present tense, as Yahweh, the “I Am”, just as he named himself, with us every moment. **Exodus 3:14**

“Ring the bells that still can ring/ Forget your perfect offering.” No matter where or when in our lives we encounter Jesus on the road, he never asks us to earn his love. Rather he asks us to put away our pride, to stop struggling to save ourselves, and instead to allow ourselves to be loved totally, sins and all. **Ephesians 2:8**

“There is a crack/A crack in everything/That's how the light gets in.” Thank God for the cracks in our hearts; they are the openings Jesus is looking for. His good news was for the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind, and the bound (Luke 4:18). And at some time in our lives we have been all of the above, desperately trying to hide the crack in our hearts from God when it is exactly in this vulnerable place that God wants to live. **2 Corinthians 4:6**

You can strike up the march/There isn't any drum/Every heart, every heart/To love will come/ But like a refugee.” Wandering, seeking protection, acceptance, love, and a true home, refugees travel with very little but humility, hope, and trust...just the way Jesus would like us to travel the road with him. **John 1:12-13**

Cohen once said this about Jesus' love and its power, *“It is an inhuman generosity. A generosity that would overthrow the world if it were embraced because nothing could weather that compassion.”*

In the lyrics of *Anthem* I heard Leonard Cohen, “a nice Jewish boy”, singing the Gospel, and showing me how despite our pride, fear, and constant wandering, God in his intense compassion wants to open every heart with his unconditional love. In a world where everything is broken in

some way, Cohen says don't ever stop ringing out the good news of the generous, saving love we have experienced.' For me that is an earworm worth repeating.

Christine Orzepowski- Christine can often be found in the PCUM choir on Sunday mornings.



Thursday, March 5: Psalm 27

The Spiritual Practice of Centering Prayer

The practice of Centering Prayer (also known as Christian meditation) is to create a mantra to focus yourself on as you spend several minutes in stillness and quiet. This mantra is repeated slowly with the breath pattern.

Today, please read through Psalm 27 and select a verse that stands out to you. Then find a comfortable seat in a quiet space (if you can). Once you are comfortable, spend as long as you have time (at least 5 minutes) slowly repeating this verse or phrase to yourself. Perhaps the first half of the verse or phrase while you inhale and the second half while you exhale.

If your mind begins to travel elsewhere during this process, that's okay. Just return to your verse and continue. Once you feel more centered, calm, connected to the divine, end your centering prayer with the Lord's Prayer (below).

Psalm 127 (CEB)

The LORD is my light and my salvation.

Should I fear anyone?

The LORD is a fortress protecting my life.

Should I be frightened of anything?

² When evildoers come at me trying to eat me up—

it's they, my foes and my enemies,
who stumble and fall!

³ If an army camps against me,
my heart won't be afraid.

If war comes up against me,

I will continue to trust in this:

⁴ I have asked one thing from the LORD—

it's all I seek:
to live in the LORD's house all the days of my life,
seeing the LORD's beauty
and constantly adoring his temple.

⁵ Because he will shelter me in his own dwelling

during troubling times;
he will hide me in a secret place in his own tent;
he will set me up high, safe on a rock.

⁶ Now my head is higher than the enemies surrounding me,
and I will offer sacrifices in God's tent—
sacrifices with shouts of joy!

I will sing and praise the LORD.

⁷ LORD, listen to my voice when I cry out—
have mercy on me and answer me!

⁸ Come, my heart says, seek God's face.
LORD, I do seek your face!

⁹ Please don't hide it from me!
Don't push your servant aside angrily—
you have been my help!

God who saves me,
don't neglect me!

Don't leave me all alone!

¹⁰ Even if my father and mother left me all alone,
the LORD would take me in.

¹¹ LORD, teach me your way;
because of my opponents, lead me on a good path.

¹² Don't give me over to the desires of my enemies,
because false witnesses and violent accusers
have taken their stand against me.

¹³ But I have sure faith
that I will experience the LORD's goodness
in the land of the living!

¹⁴ Hope in the LORD!
Be strong! Let your heart take courage!
Hope in the LORD!

Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.



Friday, March 6: Genesis 14:17-24

It Is So

And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High.

He blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,

maker of heaven and earth;

and blessed be God Most High,

who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

- Genesis 14:18-20

The Bible starts with, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. Then there are countless stories covering thousands of years in every literary genre. I enjoy a good mystery, and few biblical characters seem as mysterious as Melchizedek. Genesis introduces him as a king and priest who blesses Abram, then poof - he is gone. Or so it may seem.

Fast forward about 1,000 years, and in Psalm 110 King David says of the coming Messiah; “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Then about 1,000 years after that, the writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews confirms that, "For it is attested by God of Him, “You (Christ) are a Priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”

The beauty of the bible is that every storyline and every character is more complex and fascinating than may seem at face value. We can study and do a deep dive into the history of a character like Melchizedek. Or, we can spend a few minutes letting a couple of verses help us listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

In the Old Testament, Melchizedek offers bread and wine and blesses Abram. At the Last Supper, Jesus uses bread and wine as a symbol for us to remember Him. Then upon His resurrection, He provides to us the ultimate blessing of reconciliation to God.

Eternal life is the blessing we receive through Jesus. Lent is a time to observe and prepare for the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Spending some time with one character or story in the bible is a wonderful way to observe and prepare. Or very simply, we can spend this day of Lent thinking about how a person blessed our life. The mysterious character named Melchizedek helps me understand why our bible concludes with, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all your blessings, especially eternal life. Please help me to be grateful of those who have blessed me, and fill my spirit so that I can bless someone today. Amen.

Robert Smith is a Ruler Elder currently on Session and serving on the Mission and Service Committee. He also is the proud father of Chloe and Gabrielle, and loving husband to Tara.



Saturday, March 7: Psalm 118:26-29

Steadfast Love

“You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

- Psalm 118:28-29 (NRSV)

How do you measure steadfast love?
How do you keep track?
God’s love for me is steadfast,
It’s steadfast for you, too?

How do you measure steadfast love?
In the crummiest moments of your day
When the sun shines or a baby laughs
Or a shimmer of hope arises.

God reminds me that I’m not alone.
God walks beside me.
The feelings of love, of human love,
Will fade if not cared for.

But God’s steadfast love—now that’s forever.

Prayer: Loving God, I give you thanks for your never ending, always constant love. Thank you for loving me beyond what I can imagine. Thank you for being there in the wonderful moments and the sad, dark moments and everything in between. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Pastor Katherine Scott-Kirschner has a poet for a mother and thoroughly enjoys writing free-style poetry, too. She sure loves haikus. They bring to life hard thoughts. Do you like them, too?



Sunday, March 8: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

All Great Plans

*... from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates
- Genesis 15:18b*

We all make long-term plans. We paint pictures of where we will be at 30, 40, 50, 60 and beyond. If these plans include creating a family, we begin painting pictures on behalf of other people. We envision our future together and our plans become multi-generational as we paint pictures for our children.

Seldom, however, is the path a straight one. Situations arise that we never could have envisioned. Loved ones choose paths that we never would have chosen for them. Obstacles, whether they be related to health, relationships or finances, almost inevitably impact our lives. Try as we might, we cannot hope to completely control every element that impacts our long-term plans. It can be easy to lose sight of the path and the goals we laid out for ourselves. Sometimes, we start drafting plans B, C and D.

In those moments, strength can be found in God's word. Jesus fulfilled his promise to us on the cross and knowing that you've lived by His word, no matter what the circumstances, provides the confidence that your path will be fulfilled, whether it be plan A, B, C, D or something beyond your wildest dreams.

Prayer: Lord, help me live by your word through every circumstance I face in life. Amen.

*The Browns – Matt, Olivia, Alexandra, Nolan and Madeline
We have been PCUM members since 2007 (and visitors before that). Alexandra, Nolan and Madeline were baptized at PCUM. We enjoy church activities, including Sunday School (as teachers and students), Youth Group, Friday Night Live and MESH.*



Monday, March 9: Romans 4:1-12

The Example of Abraham

... The scriptures says, 'Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.' ... those who depend on faith, not on deeds, and who believe in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is this faith that God takes into account in order to put them right with himself.

-Romans 4:3 and 5 (Good News Translation)

Is it really that simple?

**God's Love... God's Grace... God's Forgiveness... God's Joy....
God's Peace... God's Judgement... God's Promise...
is received through our
Faith in Jesus Christ.**

Yeah, it is really that simple.

Prayer: Dear God, you ask so little of us, and yet you give us so much in return. You know we are all imperfect, and yet you forgive us. And no matter who we are and what we do, there is no difference between us. We are all your children and if we only believe... if we only have faith... we are righteous in your eyes. Thank you for making it simple. Amen.

Jace Wagner is a 22-year member of PCUM. He is married to Karen and they have two children, Jack and Emma.



Tuesday, March 10: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

What is “Faithful”?

“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”

-1 Corinthians 10:13b

When I was in high school, I dreamed of being a doctor, a general practitioner, to be exact. I wanted and felt drawn to walking along side people in their overall health and wellbeing. I wanted to get to know my patients and provide care for them over the years. My desire to be a doctor came from my desire to help people be physically whole.

This was all fine and good until I got to college and reality hit. I was not as good at the sciences as I thought I was. College level courses were much more difficult than high school level courses and I felt way out of my element. For my whole first year, I struggled silently with my classes. I enjoyed my overall college experience but not my academic experience.

Then, in April of my first-year, God told me that I was to go into ministry. I had a mystical God experience sitting in a busy cafeteria while eating lunch one Friday afternoon. God reached out and communicated with me in that moment and I listened. The moment I did, I felt free. I felt elated. I felt called.

The next three years at Smith College, followed by three years at seminary really did reinforce that God called me into ministry. Back in high school, I was on the right track. But instead of healing the physical body and finding physical healing, I was actually called to walk with people as they explored their spiritual healing and wholeness.

This calling—both while I was ‘in training’ and now—is not always easy. And when I have doubts about this whole “God thing” or about my suitability to be a pastor, I remember that it’s really not about me. It’s about God. And it is about God’s faithfulness.

God knew what my calling was/is. God knew that I would get there, but God also knew that I was stubborn and would have gone through all four years of college struggling and not exploring other possibilities without God’s intervention. God was and is faithful to me. God was, is, and will be faithful to you. And I know this, because God was faithful to the Israelites and then to the whole rest of the world through Christ.

Thanks be to God that God is faithful and will always be there—even when I mess up, turn away, doubt, or question. God is faithful through it all. God is faithful no matter what. Amen and amen.

Prayer: Loving Christ, thank you for embodying your holy faithfulness here on earth. Thank you for showing up in flesh so that I can be welcomed into your loving family. Guide me on your faithful path. In your name, Amen.

Pastor Katherine's life ambitions have been many things. She is currently beyond satisfied with being your pastor. Thank you for opening up your heart and your life to her.



Wednesday, March 11: Psalm 105:1-42

The Spiritual Practice of Imaginative Reading

Imaginative reading takes us from our brains from just reading the words on the page to imagining the scene we've just read. After you read the verses selected here once fully, go through the passage a second time and this time pause after each completed thought and imagine what the psalmist is verbally describing. The 'goal' of this practice is to engage the imaginative sources of our brains. The more details you can add to the scene, the picture in your brain, the better. This may not be an easy thing for you, but with practice (and patience), it can become easier.

Psalm 105:7-14a, 24-28, 37-43 (CEB)

The LORD—he is our God.

His justice is everywhere throughout the whole world.

⁸ God remembers his covenant forever,
the word he commanded to a thousand generations,

⁹ which he made with Abraham,
the solemn pledge he swore to Isaac.

¹⁰ God set it up as binding law for Jacob,
as an eternal covenant for Israel,

¹¹ promising, "I hereby give you the land of Canaan
as your allotted inheritance."

¹² When they were few in number—
insignificant, just immigrants—

¹³ wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to the next,

¹⁴ God didn't let anyone oppress them.

²⁴ God made his people very fruitful,
more powerful than their enemies,

²⁵ whose hearts God changed so they hated his people
and dealt shrewdly with his servants.

²⁶ God sent Moses his servant
and the one he chose, Aaron.

²⁷ They put God's signs on Egypt,
his marvelous works on the land of Ham.

²⁸ God sent darkness, and it became dark,
but the Egyptians rejected his word.

³⁷ Then God brought Israel out, filled with silver and gold;
not one of its tribes stumbled.

- 38 Egypt celebrated when they left,
because the dread of Israel had come upon them.
- 39 God spread out clouds as a covering;
gave lightning to provide light at night.
- 40 The people asked, and God brought quail;
God filled them full with food from heaven.
- 41 God opened the rock and out gushed water—
flowing like a river through the desert!
- 42 Because God remembered his holy promise
to Abraham his servant,
- 43 God brought his people out with rejoicing,
his chosen ones with songs of joy.

Prayer: Loving God, you chose your people and you supported your people. You loved your people. And then you opened the doors to the whole world to be your people. Thank you for including me on your list of beloved children of God. Your faithfulness is evident in the Scriptures and in my life, when I take the time to notice. Thank you for that gift of steadfast love. Amen.



Thursday, March 12: Daniel 3:19-30

The Big Three

“Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, ‘Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!’ So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.”

-Daniel 3:26

I was raised on Veggie Tales and one of their many episodes is all about their story in the prophetic book of Daniel. This link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qbr4yNk19fM>) is the specific moment in this episode where they are thrown into the fiery furnace.

It did a great job in teaching me the story—such a great story that for a long time I associated this story with vegetables. And the story is such an amazing one: a narcissistic king who throws people into ridiculously hot furnaces for not worshipping a giant statue of him who then acknowledges their God once they come out of the blaze unharmed.

Talk about miraculous! The big three of biblical names that most people know but would probably not name their child (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) stand up for what they believe with their lives. And they come out of the situation victorious!

But real life often doesn't feel that way. The leader typically gets their way while the people who have a minority opinion get silenced. This can be seen on a national level, a state level, and a local level. This can even be seen on a personal level. So, what does this story mean to us today?

Perhaps, it means to trust. Or never give up hope. Or to worship God no matter what others may do. Or that justice will be found in this unjust world.

Prayer: Gracious God, the Bible describes the miraculous ways that you are with people. Thank you for being with me in the times of joy and the times of sorrow. Thank you for never leaving my side, even when I doubt or turn away from your face. Help me to stay present to your presence in my life. Amen.

Pastor Katherine really did love Veggie Tales as a kid. She also had influential people in her life who taught her some biblical stories, but Veggies Tales were (typically) a much more fun way to learn.



Friday, March 13: Daniel 12:1-4

The Apocalypse

“There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since the nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found in the book.”

- Daniel 12:1b

How swift, how far
the sea
carries a body from shore.

Empires fail, species are lost,
spotted frogs
and tufted puffins forsaken.

After eons of fauna and flora, hominids have stood
for mere years
baffled brains atop battered shoulders.

In a murky blanket of heavens
an icy planet
made of diamond spins.

Our sun winks like the star
it was
billions of years ago, without ambition.

We bury bodies in shallow dirt, heedless of lacking space
or how long
our makeshift planet will host us.

[This poem is by Risa Denenberg and is titled “Ice Will Suffice” accessed from <https://m.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/ice-would-suffice> on Feb. 19, 2019]

Prayer: God, I have no idea when the end of the world might be. But I know that whenever it comes, you will deliver your people. You are faithful and justice. The arch of your creation is justice. Help that arch move towards justice now and maybe that will be enough of an apocalypse. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Risa Denenberg is a nurse practitioner and poet. Pastor Katherine found her poem on the internet and thought it captured the essence of Daniel’s understanding of the end of times. You can read more about Risa at: <https://risadenenberg.weebly.com/>

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**Saturday, March 14: Luke 6:43-45**

**Which Fruit?**

*“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit...”*  
- Luke 6:43

-Bad Tree bears bad fruit.

*“A thousand words will not leave so deep an impression as one deed”*  
*Henrik Ibsen*

Jim Carey’s character, Fletcher Reede, at the beginning of the film “Liar, Liar” is a smooth talking, callous attorney who will say and do anything to win. His insensitive behavior and empty promises bleed into his personal life, costing him his marriage and respect of and relationship with his son. A few plot twists reveal to Fletcher the error of his ways, the pain he left in his wake, and the tremendous price he paid.

-Good Tree bears good fruit.

*“The Love you show in all you do, reveals that Jesus lives in you.”*  
*Unknown*

The Italian film “Life Is Beautiful” tells the story of Guido, played so beautifully by Roberto Benigni. Actions inspired by Guido’s pure love and selflessness enable his young son, Giosue, to endure enemy occupation and interment in a Nazi Concentration camp. Giosue miraculously survives the horrors of World War II with his good humor, imagination, compassion for others, and a healthy appreciation for the joy of life still intact.

Ultimately, what matters is our heart. These extreme examples show in a simple way that, when God’s grace and love live within, our words and actions, no matter how seemingly insignificant, reveal our true character.

**Prayer:** Loving God, as we prepare for the Resurrection of your son, we thank you for showing us the way. May our faith in you permeate all we say and do. Help us remember that by sharing your love, we tangibly honor your son’s sacrifice and can shine the light of your grace on the darkest corners of your world. Amen.

*Melody Williams and her husband, Tom, have been a members of PCUM for 23 years. She and Tom have 3 grown children: Caitlin, Austin, and Miranda. Melody has served as a Deacon, on Session and briefly lead the Church school programs.*

**Sunday, March 15: Isaiah 55:1-9**

**God is Near**

*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

*- Isaiah 55:6-7 (KJV)*

I like routines. They help me stay organized. However, I often find myself getting lost in my routines. Upon realization, I cannot help but feel I am missing something, perhaps numerous things as I prioritize most of my time to completing set tasks. Lent can be a time to refocus, to reflect and to recognize that there is always room for God.

One day when I was 6 years old, I was eager as ever to make sandcastles and jump into the clear water during a family trip to the beach. My older sister warned me multiple times to not venture too far into the waves. I understood her instructions, but I did not follow them. As I continued to test the waves, I could feel the ocean pulling me further out and could no longer stand upright. I was flooded with sheer terror. I looked for something to hold on to and in that instant, an arm grabbed me and pulled me back toward the shore. My sister had brought me back to safety. I remember I was truly sorry for choosing to ignore her warnings and frightened she would be mad. She smiled and handed me my pail and shovel.

When we are prepared to acknowledge our wrongdoings, God is already present—he is ready to listen and to forgive with mercy.

**Prayer:** Merciful God, guide us to turn to you with open hearts and minds, away from the distractions that distance ourselves from you. Help us to unburden our shortcomings and to embody your everlasting love and will.

*Amy Bortey, her parents Seth and Cynthia, and her brother Andrew have been members of PCUM for about 10 years. They enjoy being part of such a wonderful, lively church community and are grateful God led them to a fellowship as special as PCUM. Amy participated in PCUM's mission trip to Kenya in 2013, volunteers with the partner soup kitchens and teaches Sunday School.*



**Monday, March 16: Romans 2:1-11**

**Only True Judge**

*“Therefore, you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge other; for in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself...Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”*

*- Romans 2:1 and 4b*

The only true judge is God.  
The only one above the muck  
Is the one who can truly pluck  
Out what treatment I am due.

And the beauty is that God’s  
Kindness and love and mercy  
Extends beyond what I can see  
Envelops me with grace

This grace that fills the whole world  
It soars above and dips below  
This grace that God freely bestows  
Is what I am called to also give.

Instead of judgement- love  
Instead of bitterness- hope  
Whenever I want to mope  
I definitely need the reminder

That grace fills the whole world  
God’s grace is for me, for you,  
And for the “other,” too.  
It’s not up to me who gets God’s grace.  
And that, too, is a blessing.

**Prayer:** Merciful God, you are the only true judge. And it is in your mercy and grace that I find myself kneeling before you and asking for abundant forgiveness. Help me to judge others less and to trust you more. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

*Pastor Katherine wrote this poem and prayer, too.*



Tuesday, March 17: Ezekiel 17:1-10

### Bearing Fruit

*“But there was another great eagle with great wings; and behold this vine bent its roots toward him and shot forth its branches toward him that he might water it. From the bed where it was planted, he transplanted it to good soil by abundant waters, that it might bring forth branches, and bear fruit - and become a noble vine.”*

- Ezekiel 17: 7-8



*Picture: A fruit tree with the fruit of “hope,” “love,” “faith,” “justice,” and “God” is the focal point of the hand drawn picture. There is also a bird in the lower background and a sun shining upon the scene.*

As we enter the season of Lent, let us as a Church community - and as individuals- reflect on what we have been given. God wants to reach out and have a relationship with all of us; this occurs in many ways. It’s important for us to keep our eyes open, aware of how we can best respond to God’s blessing and love.

As Christians, we are called to reflect the light and love of God. We need to give thanks - and show our thanks - by reaching out and extending “our branches”- helping, teaching, giving. This is how we can respond to God’s glory.

**Prayer:** Loving God: Help us to stay in relationship with you during this Lenten journey, recognizing your Love and gifts to us. May we reflect on all of your blessings and fruits in our actions. Open our eyes to all we have been given by you - and through your son Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Kennedy family, Andrew Kennedy, Ruling Elder, formerly on Session, at PCUM; Stephanie Kennedy; Sophia Kennedy - age 8; and Sarah Kennedy- age 7, worked together to create today’s devotion. The girls drew the lovely picture and hope that you are able to connect to God’s word more through their collaboration.*



**Wednesday, March 18: Luke 13:18-21**

**Just a Tiny Bit**

*“[Jesus] said therefore, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It’s like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree...”*

*- Luke 13:18-19a*



*Photo: a field of mustard plants in bloom. The mustard seed is a tiny seed that can create a very tall and wild looking plant with yellow flowers.*

What image of growth speaks to you? In what way is God calling you to grow?

Where have you seen tremendous growth in your life? From something tiny to something big?

**Prayer:** O God, you are beyond what I can ever imagine: your family, your home, your connection is able to start as a tiny seed and then grow and grow and grow to cover an entire field. Help my faith and witness to your grace and love grow just like that. Amen.

*Pastor Katherine has never really had a “green thumb” but she does hope to metaphorically garden and produce fruit—fruit of the Spirit.*



**Thursday, March 19: 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5**

**Our PCUM Family**

*So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.*

*- 2 Corinthians 4:16*

At the beginning of this year, I began the second semester of my junior year of college. Along with being a student, I have a part-time job as well as obligations to PCUM and to my family and boyfriend. A few weeks into this semester, I just felt overwhelmed. So, for two Sundays in a row, I skipped our service. I lost a bit of heart in worship during this time; it felt great to have Sunday free to catch up on work and spend time with my family. I'm sure most of us have felt like this at some point. However, recently, something struck me during worship. At one point in the service, I looked around the sanctuary. I realized that one thing that brings all of us to worship on Sundays is a deep desire to be better. To become closer to being the people we are called to be. We are all trying our best, and that is beautiful. This helped renew my spirit and my love for worship and my PCUM family.

The next time you attend a PCUM service, I invite you to pause briefly. Allow your mind to wander for just a moment, and look at the people around you. You may see a young couple trying to quiet their exuberant toddler; you may see a confirmand struggling to stay awake; you yourself may be feeling stressed or a bit hopeless. Siblings in Christ, these are God's people. This is our church family. Each one of us is loved by God, absolutely unconditionally. Each of us is trying to be better. This is why I do not lose heart. Worshipping with all of you renews my spirit immensely. I would like to take this chance to thank you for that.

**Prayer:** Loving God, thank you for your people. They lead wildly busy lives, and yet they still make time for you and for your church. Help us to not lose heart. Amen.

*My name is Emma Gritsch. I attend PCUM with my parents and my younger siblings Sophie, Harry, Lily, and Sadie, and with my boyfriend, James, who joins us whenever he can. I serve as an Elder on the Worship and Music committee, help lead the Middle School Youth Group, and teach Sunday school for the third and fourth grade class.*





**Friday, March 20: Psalm 32**

**The Spiritual Practice of Walking the Labyrinth**

The labyrinth is another form of prayer meditation. It looks like a maze but there is only one path—the path to the center, which then leads you back into the world. Today, we have a finger labyrinth. Take a few moments, read Psalm 29 and the prayer below. Then “walk the labyrinth.” Use your finger to trace the path. (If this is difficult due to the size of your screen, feel free to mimic the image to the best of your ability on another surface). If you’re in a space where you can walk at the same time, go for it! While you trace, pray—either part of Psalm 32, the prayer written here, or your own prayer to God. Once you get to the center, thank God for whatever bubbled up during the walk into the middle. Then, follow the same path out, this time asking God to help you use whatever insight in your life today, tomorrow, the future.



**Prayer:** Merciful God, I know there are ways that I have turned away from you. I know there are times when I had the opportunity to turn back but didn't. Thank you for always being ready for me to admit my wrong doings and supporting me through the good and the bad. In Jesus' name. Amen.



**Saturday, March 21: Exodus 32:7-14**

**Are You Mad at Me?**

*“Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”*

*- Exodus 32:10*

Now that’s something I can get my head around – God being mad, really angry, get-away-from-me angry. Isn’t that how God should react when the Israelites worship another God that cannot and will not and has not been there for them? Don’t I believe God should be mad at me – on a small scale or in a big way – for the idols I create and worship, when I am “stiff-necked” (what a great image), ignoring God’s promise and love for me and for the world too? But that is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel - and Moses knows that and reminds God about God’s own people. Moses, like us, pleads with God – actually he makes an amazingly strong case for God’s remembering his people. Moses, because of his close relationship with God, being in the very presence of God, can have this conversation. God never abandons his promise – even in his deep disappointment, he was going to keep the promise to Moses. And God hears him and reclaims his people. God did not and will not break his promises to all his children – God hears us and claims us too.

**Prayer:** God of our real daily lives, we disappoint you and we disappoint each other more than we want to admit. We trust in things that are not life giving – and lead us away from you. During this season of Lent especially, show us what stands in the way of becoming our true selves. We trust that you are with us – in times of anger, sadness, and joy, all of which are wrapped in your eternal love. In Jesus name, Amen.

*Laura Phillips lives in Verona with her husband John and is often seen in NYC with her children, John and Meg, who live and work there! She has been involved in life at PCUM since joining in 1994 and loves being involved with confirmation, new members, stewardship, Session and most things PCUM!*



**Sunday, March 22: Luke 15:11b-32**

### **Returning**

*“Then the father said to [the older son], ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”*

*- Luke 15:31-32*



*Image: A daughter runs to her father at the airport. The father’s arms are open wide as an expression of welcome and joy.*

Just as the father in the text today rejoices when his son returns and the daughter in the above image rejoices when her father returns, God always rejoices when we turn away from the whatever separates our lives from God.

Where is a place in your life that you’ve turned away from what God would desire? How is God calling you to turn again—this time back to God’s voice?

**Prayer:** Mother, Father, Parent God, you created me in your image, and you delight when I am home in your arms. Whenever I leave your way for me, you search the road for my return. Help me to find my way back to your loving path and your loving arms. In Your name, amen.

*Pastor Katherine has always loved the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It speaks to the way that God loves us. It speaks to the way that we are called to love one another. It shows that forgiveness is needed in everyone's hearts.*



## Monday, March 23: Psalm 53

### The Spiritual Practice of Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a three step Scripture reading practice. The first time you read the text, read the text slowly with the goal of taking in what the base meaning, arch, or story of the text is.

Then pause and give yourself a couple minutes to reflect on the text you just read. Is there anything that really stood out to you? Let the Spirit move as you reflect upon the text.

Read the text again. This time notice what word or phrase really sticks out to you or stays with you. After you finish the passage, reflect on what that word or phrase means in your life today for a few minutes.

Finally, read the passage a third time, this time as a prayer or conversation with God. When you are done, give space for God to respond to this prayer before ending with prayer provided with this devotional.

### Psalm 53 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.”  
They are corrupt, they commit abominable acts;  
there is no one who does good.

<sup>2</sup> God looks down from heaven on humankind  
to see if there are any who are wise,  
who seek after God.

<sup>3</sup> They have all fallen away, they are all alike perverse;  
there is no one who does good,  
no, not one.

<sup>4</sup> Have they no knowledge, those evildoers,  
who eat up my people as they eat bread,  
and do not call upon God?

<sup>5</sup> There they shall be in great terror,  
in terror such as has not been.

For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly;  
they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them.

<sup>6</sup> O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!  
When God restores the fortunes of his people,  
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

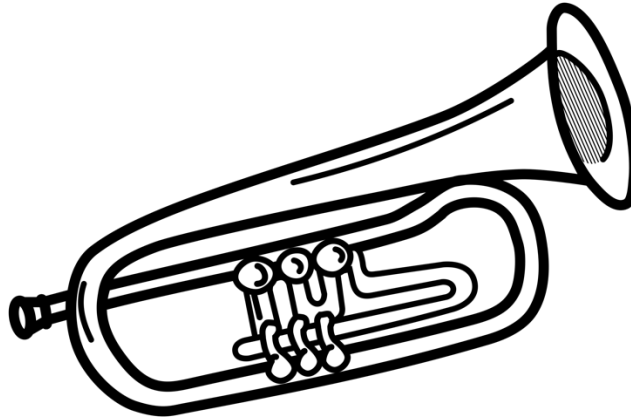
**Prayer:** Creator God, you allow us to tell you how we experience the world—the good and the bad. You want us to be honest and truthful to you, even in our anger or frustration. Thank you for the examples of the Psalms that show every emotion possible. You gave me deliverance in Christ and there are not enough thanks for that. Thank you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Tuesday, March 24: Leviticus 25:1-19

The Trumpet Sound

“Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land.”

-Leviticus 25:9



Did you know that God told the Israelites to have a “jubilee year?” This is the fiftieth year where land and people who were bought or sold or traded are returned. So, ancestral land that was sold because you ran out of money, would be returned to that family in the fiftieth year. If a person had become destitute and they sold themselves into slavery, then on the fiftieth year, they would be released. God provided not just sabbath days and sabbath years, but also a freedom year.

This special year was ushered in by trumpet. Is there anything in your life that needs a trumpet signal to release yourself from? Where in your life are you stuck? Or overworked? Perhaps it is in those places that Jesus is standing beside you, holding a trumpet, and welcoming you to lay down your burden.

Prayer: O God, you provide for me. You provide me more than I need. You provide me a call to rest—which can be harder to accept than I would like to admit. Help me to hear that trumpet call in my life, so that I can give you my burdens and release the stress or worry from my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Pastor Katherine struggles with giving parts of her life their much-deserved Sabbath rest. Lent is a great time to practice doing just that.

Wednesday, March 25: 2 Kings 4:1-7

Unexpected Abundance

“So she left [Elisha] and shut the door behind her and her children’ they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring [oil]. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” But he said to her, “There are no more.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

- 2 Kings 4:5-6

We are in possession of more than we know when facing disaster. In these verses, it is debt that threatens a family, though other circumstances can be construed similarly as offering no hope or way out. Here a man of God discerns high value in an overlooked household commodity and a miracle ensues.

As illustration, I point to the turn of events in my own life this year. For me, the overlooked commodity was a longstanding but taken-for-granted friendship with my late wife’s dear friend, Patty, who with two kids in college and a disabled ex-husband, was forced to sell her home in Randolph, then stayed with me temporarily after two cancelled sales agreements prevented her plans from negotiating a lease. We both faced a wall, me languishing in solitariness.

Our unanticipated arrangement happily persisted (I refer to Patty and her kids as my fake family) and provided a path through unyielding circumstances. I would argue my fake family fostered the miracle for me of meeting my dear Bonnie to whom I am now engaged to be married, the happy prospect of which I expect to see me to the end of my days!

Prayer: Dear God, where is the jar of precious oil for me and for our world where we can see no way through our difficulties? Help me discern what is precious and already available to me if I only knew. Lord, your love sustains us and is beyond our knowing. Amen.

John Wiedemann is a joyful and steadfast member of the PCUM Chancel Choir.



Thursday, March 26: Isaiah 43:1-7

You are God's

“But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name you are mine.”

- Isaiah 43:1

The beauty of this passage is Isaiah is that God is using Isaiah to tell God's people that God has not left them. They have been exiled, but in this passage, they are being restored to their homeland. All of their fear or dread can be washed away because God is welcoming them back to their promised land.

The people of Israel and of Judah had been exiled because of their unfaithfulness to God. They had been taken to faraway lands, away from the land promised to their ancestors. But God doesn't end the story there. Instead, God restores the land to them.

When I was in fourth grade, I had only one friend. None of the other girls in my class would talk to me. To this day, I have no idea why, but that was my reality. I felt very alone that year, though I was incredibly grateful to the one girl who stayed by my side. I was, in an elementary school way, exiled from the people I had spent the last couple years getting to know. It was a hard year. I remember coming home from school crying and asking God ‘why?’ and ‘what can I do to make them like me?’

That year came to an end. And in fifth grade, I had an amazing teacher and, somehow, over the summer, the girls from my fourth-grade class forgot to exclude me, so I did have friends. I would not say that I was ‘redeemed,’ but I was able to heal and to move forward with my social life.

Maybe you've had an experience in your life of a ‘exile.’ A time when you feel totally shaken up and displaced. In those moments, God is still with you. Just as God is with you in the happy times. You are God's. Christ came to earth so that we can all be members of God's chosen people. You are God's. And God is faithful.

Prayer: Faithful God, you created me. You formed me. And you are always with me. Thank you for welcoming me into your family. For loving me with open arms. Help me to love others with that same deep love. Amen.

Pastor Katherine has always enjoyed reading from the prophet Isaiah. The book as a whole shows the dynamic relationship between God and the people of Israel: before, during, and at the end of the exile.



Friday, March 27: Psalm 126

Weeping with Seeds to Sow

*“May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.”
- Psalm 126:5*

Throughout the traumas in my life, I’ve felt that God was in still in control; that God wanted me to experience these things so that I would be able to empathize with a wider range of people’s pain and thereby be able to share God’s goodness with those people. Through my tears I’d say, “OK God. You’re telling me that You’ve got this.” I felt like a boat, skimming over the top of troubled waters with God blowing divine wind into the sails.

But when my teenage son went off the rails, the waters grew darker and choppy. Through months of this horror show, I maintained this dialogue with God with a white-knuckled grip. My chest tightened when my phone would ring. Was it the school? The police? A hospital?

Every day of the long intake into a residential treatment center and getting the insurance and intervention transportation company in place felt like a day I might lose my child. After weeks of doing everything I could, I received word that the insurance was taking too long to clear, and we’d lost the bed at the RTC and also the transport reservation. My son’s life was hanging by a thread, and I – his mother – couldn’t save him. I sat sobbing at my dining room table. “Uncle, God!” I shrieked. “Jesus, please help me!” “I know You trust me to handle a lot, but this is too much! I’m giving it to You and trusting that You have us in the palm of Your hand.”

Within sixty seconds, my phone rang. The insurance had suddenly processed. A bed had suddenly opened up. There was suddenly transport. I inhaled from a fire hose of hope and was once again a witness to the divine passage from the impounding Spirit which is possible through God. I believe my weeping watered the seeds I carried. I return with a song of joy, and I trust that, from this mess, God will bring a life-giving message to those who need it.

Prayer: All-powerful, in-control God, thank you for trusting us to carry seeds to sow through our traumas. Please help us to remember that our tears, though they sting, water these seeds so that You may bring life from them through which all may experience the joy that is Your love and very real power in our lives. Amen.

Rena Baker - A PCUM member since '01, Rena is the founder/dir. of I S.M.I.L.E. in New York Productions, the author of Defeating Scrooge – How to Harness the Power of Christmas Carols to Revive Your Spirit Any Time of Year, and a public speaker, (bit.ly/watchRenaBakerTEDx). Rena loves her PCUM family and travels from Westfield on Sundays for church services and for Thursday choir rehearsals.



Saturday, March 28: John 11:45-57

Camouflage

“Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done.”

- John 11:45-46

Who would have thought
That after the miracle of raising Lazarus
People would want to kill you?
Now that sure did cause a fuss.

You loved him so dearly
That you had to save him from an early death.
Your friend and your supporter
It was you who had the power to bring back his breath.

And so, you did. Without a second thought.
But the religious leaders didn't enjoy
The way you made a statement of love
And so they came up with a ploy

A ploy that would send you to the cross
A ploy that would mark a monumental change
They never saw the full picture of your power
That you were here to make an exchange.

And an exchange you made!
You have saved us from us
And welcomed us into yourself.
Thank you, Jesus.

Prayer: Jesus, help me to be one of the people who believed what you did. Help me to share your message of service to others above my own desires. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Katherine remembers writing her first rhyming poem in elementary school and how she had to think long and hard about couplets. This is still true today—only now with the internet at her disposal, it is easier!



Sunday, March 29: Isaiah 43:16-21

Look to the Future

*“Forget the things that have happened in the past.”
-Isaiah 43:18.*

This statement from God is something that I think we should all keep in our minds while living out life. When the Lord says this, it is in the context of how there is a new beginning for the Israelites, and it starts with a fresh journey. Once the Egyptians were destroyed after the parting of the Red Sea, God tells the chosen ones that this is their start and that they shouldn't be focused on what happened before. This is extremely important because in life, we cannot simply continue our future journey while keeping one eye looking back at the past. It will do us no good. I think that this mostly applies to our mistakes in life and for forgiving ourselves and others. Sometimes we make stupid mistakes, but instead of fretting it, we should work for repentance. When others make mistakes, it doesn't help anyone by making something out of it. You are honorable when you forgive others, even though it is hard, grudges and hatred are only the death of us.

When you are a kid, like me, it seems easiest to stay upset with friends who have hurt your feelings, or with parents and family members who have made a mistake, and sometimes I do that. Sometimes the best way to think about it is just to move on and forgive. Forgiveness comes straight from the heart, and it is pure. One thing that keeps us from forgiving others is self pity, which can be hard to get over. But overall, you need to figure what is most kind, and holy thing to do.

Prayer: Dear loving, caring, and gracious God, give us the help we need to move forward without always looking back, and to forgive others and ourselves when mistakes have been made. Help us to live a life for the future, and while using guidance from the past, finding new ways to live a holy and loving life.

Maggie Horn is in seventh grade and has been part of this community since her dad, Pastor Greg Horn, became the pastor here at PCUM. She is currently playing Lacrosse, Field Hockey, and Volley Ball. Maggie also attends Middle School Youth Group almost every week.



Monday, March 30: Exodus 40:1-15

Anointing Oil

“Then you shall take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture, so that it shall become holy.”

- Exodus 40:9



Image: a close up of a bottle with oil pouring out of its spout.

Anointing with oil made the holy artifacts holy. A simple base used to cook and eat was used by God as a special way to mark sacred objects. God could have used anything to make things ‘holy,’ but God used a basic oil that was accessible to almost everyone. Two ordinary things (oil and an object/a person) are transformed because of God’s uniting them.

What simple thing in your life is God calling you to use for a special purpose? What gifts could you ‘anoint’ as holy?

Prayer: Holy and Marvelous God, lead me to a place of anointed-ness, a place of sacred, within myself and the ways you have blessed me. You take me as I am and make me holy through Christ and in Christ. Thank you for that gift. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Pastor Katherine hopes that God illuminates in your life the places God has already anointed to be used to proclaim God’s unimaginable grace and Jesus’ unending love.



Tuesday, March 31: Psalm 20

The Spiritual Practice of Imaginative Reading

Imaginative reading takes us from our brains from just reading the words on the page to imagining the scene we've just read. After you read the verses selected here once fully, go through the passage a second time and this time pause after each completed thought and imagine what the psalmist is verbally describing. The 'goal' of this practice is to engage the imaginative sources of our brains. The more details you can add to the scene, the picture in your brain, the better. This may not be an easy thing for you, but with practice (and patience), it can become easier.

Psalm 20 (CEB)

¹ I pray that the LORD answers you
whenever you are in trouble.
Let the name of Jacob's God protect you.
² Let God send help to you from the sanctuary
and support you from Zion.
³ Let God recall your many grain offerings;
let him savor your entirely burned offerings. *Selah*
⁴ Let God grant what is in your heart
and fulfill all your plans.
⁵ Then we will rejoice that you've been helped.
We will fly our flags in the name of our God.
Let the LORD fulfill all your requests!
⁶ Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed one;
God answers his anointed one
from his heavenly sanctuary,
answering with mighty acts of salvation
achieved by his strong hand.
⁷ Some people trust in chariots, others in horses;
but we praise the LORD's name.
⁸ They will collapse and fall,
but we will stand up straight and strong.
⁹ LORD, save the king!
Let him answer us when we cry out!

Prayer: LORD, your steadfast love is forever and you have anointed me as part of your family. Help me to share that steadfast love which has been given to me freely with the people all around me so that your plans, O God, may be fulfilled. In Christ's name, Amen.



Wednesday, April 1: Luke 18:31-34

Tapestry of Life

“Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.’ The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them and they did not know what he was talking about.”

- Luke 18:31-34 (NIV)

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaveth skillfully.

Oft’ times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Not ’til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver’s skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him
-Corrie Ten Boom

Prayer: Lord, just as the disciples couldn’t understand that the upcoming sorrows Jesus described to them would ultimately result in greater beauty and glory, we forget and struggle to see how trials in our lives can draw us closer to you. Please help me to remember that you are there in the darkest and most confusing hours standing by my side, creating the beautiful tapestry of this life. Amen.

Melissa Bigelow has been a member of PCUM since Spring 2009. Her children, Savannah, Kayla, Maggie and Bo were all lucky enough to be confirmed at PCUM and although they are now (mostly!) grown, she and her husband Rob look forward to being members at PCUM for many years to come.

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**Thursday, April 2: Hebrews 2:1-9**

**Reliability**

*“We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.”*

*-Hebrews 2:1 (NIV)*

I'm a beach girl. One of my first lessons in the water was to keep two landmarks on the shore in constant sight. My freedom in the water was contingent upon my obedience to staying between these landmarks. It is all too easy to be playing in the water and suddenly find that the current has taken you far from your safe area. You haven't done anything wrong, you just simply drift away.

Because of those days spent at the beach (see Mom and Dad- it wasn't a waste of time), Hebrews 2:1-9 grabbed me. “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” Okay, the senses have changed, but the meaning remains. We need to keep focused on the word of God. His word takes the place of the landmarks my parents taught me to keep in touch with. Without a conscious effort to stay connected to the word, one can easily drift away. It's not that one does something wrong, it's simply that life becomes busy. We are bombarded with information, opinions and commitments. We simply drift away. Lent is a time to remind ourselves of the need to stay connected to the Word. It's a time to commit to a conscious choice.

So, we know we have to pay attention and stay connected with God's word. So, what are the landmarks in this passage? This scripture passage argues that God's law is reliable. That doesn't just mean that if we commit sin X God will punish with consequence Y. Rather, it means that God's word carries weight. It is true. It's that simple.

Yes, it's that simple. And yes, it's bigger than big. What we must pay attention to, and keep connected with is the concept that Jesus came to earth as one of us. He spoke, performed miracles and finally suffered and died for us. For us! That's the big word here- salvation. We cannot take that for granted.

**Prayer:** Please help us, Lord, to strengthen our faith muscles. We need to commit to a daily time to stay connected to God's word and to recognize what an incredible gift he gave us, in Jesus. In Christ's name, we pray, Amen.

*Patsy Parke is a Ruler Elder currently on Session, where she is part of the Christian Education committee. Patsy, and her husband Alan, have two grown children, James and Katie.*



**Friday, April 3: Psalm 31:9-16**

**“Trouble”**

by Eric Noren based on Psalm 31:9-16

Acoustic Guitar / Key of G

Chorus 1 (G / G 6<sup>th</sup> fret / G 5<sup>th</sup> fret / G 8<sup>th</sup> fret)

Trouble, Trouble, have mercy on me Lord! / Repeat 3x

Verse 1 (G / F#/D / Em7 / C)

My eyes grow weak  
And my soul is filled with grief  
My strength fades and fails  
And my bones ache with sorrow

Bridge (Dsus / Csus / Dsus/ Csus)

Have Mercy, Have Mercy on me Lord! / Repeat 2x

Chorus 1 (reprise: G / G 6<sup>th</sup> fret / G 5<sup>th</sup> fret / G 8<sup>th</sup> fret)

Verse 2 (G / F#/D / Em7 / C)

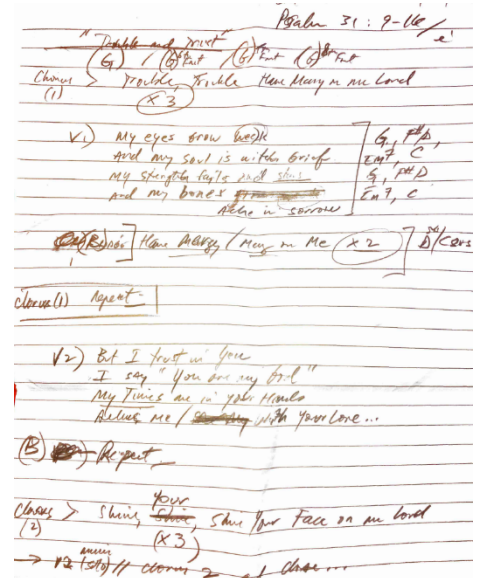
I trust, trust in You Lord  
I say, “You are my God”  
My times are in Your hands  
Deliver me with Your steadfast love

Bridge (reprise: Dsus / Csus / Dsus/ Csus)

Chorus 2 (G / G 6<sup>th</sup> fret / G 5<sup>th</sup> fret / G 8<sup>th</sup> fret)

Shine, Shine your face on me Lord! / Repeat 3x

Verse 2 / Bridge / Chorus 2 (reprise)



I've always been interested in the Psalms. They are lyrics to songs for worship. Psalm 31 is simply titled, "To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David". So, for this Lent devotional I wrote the song above on an acoustic guitar (in the PCUM "room off the kitchen" on Pastor Greg's 10-year anniversary service). I'm inspired thematically by Bob Dylan's "Shelter from Storm",

although the music is very different. Perhaps someday I will offer this song in worship like I've had the opportunity over the years to share the other Psalm-based songs I've written.

Based on my research, I understand we have no definite marking place in David's life for the Psalm 31 because he was so often in trouble. His kingdom was surrounded by hostile neighbors, just as the present nation of Israel is surrounded by hostile Arab neighbors. When writing this Psalm, David may also have been thinking of plots within his kingdom by Jewish enemies or of the days he had to flee from King Saul.

This Psalm resonates with deep and personal trust in God in the depths of difficulty. Being in difficult situations, or trouble, or in a "storm" of events can make us feel like we are on an emotional roller coaster. At times we can feel like we're in the dark, and we can't see what unexpected turn or acceleration is coming next or know when the storm is going to end.

We want the troubles to stop or certainty that they will end just like David did. We want to "get off" the emotional roller coaster. We want the storm of events, wherever and whomever they are coming from, to slow down and to get in control. Perhaps at times, we are the root cause of the trouble(s) and when we become aware that and of our self in the situation, we yearn for our own "time out." We yearn for mercy. We yearn and pray for that space of peace and quiet right now or a time quickly coming.

David always understood that God was in control and why he says, "my times are in Your hand". He trusted that God's unearthly love is greater than any of the earthly troubles we think or know we have. We have similar opportunities. In those moments when our troubles are too difficult, when the times are too rough, the storms are too intense, there also a space to open ourselves to experience and learn how the wonders of God's love "show up" or are "delivered" to us and through us. I believe that once we know and trust God's love in the most difficult of our times, it profoundly enables us to be far more aware of our family, friends, colleagues at work or school, or people in the community who experiencing trouble. And then we can connect and empathize differently. We've been there before...and someone connected with us in those times...those we expected and, in some cases, those we never expected.

David closes this section of the Psalm with a passage he borrowed from a priestly blessing described in Numbers 6: 23-27. He asks for God's face (or grace) to shine (or be showered) upon him and I believe he's doing it with the same passion and yearning as in the start when he declared he's in trouble...again. Our pastors Greg and Katherine often refer to this blessing in the Charge and Benediction at the close of worship for the wish for grace and peace of the Holy Spirit to be with us always. For reader of this Lent devotional, I wish the same for you.

**Prayer:** God of many blessings, you gave us David as a sign of a beloved member of your family who screws up again and again. You gave us the psalms as an example of all the human emotions—the highs and the lows—thank you for both of these examples. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Eric Noren is not only a song writer but is also a Ruling Elder currently on Session, where he serves as the chairperson of the Music and Worship Committee. Eric is married to Emily and they have a son, Henry.*



**Saturday, April 4: Luke 22:1-13**

**Highs and Lows**

*“So Jesus said sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it...’ So they went and found everything as [Jesus] had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.”*

*-Luke 22:8 and 13*

The Passover meal (seder) is a celebratory occasion in Jewish households. Passover lasts a whole week and it represents when God freed the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. This is a joyous week of gratitude and remembrance. But it is also a week where no yeasted products are allowed.

Jesus and his disciples follow the Jewish ritual calendar and they find themselves at the beginning of this joyous week without a home to hold the Seder meal. Jesus sends two of his disciples to take care of the details for him and the others.

In the meantime, Judas has agreed to betray Jesus. Right before this event that is a remembrance of what God has done to free the people from slavery, Judas has betrayed his teacher, his rabbi. Jesus still welcomes him to the table later in the chapter during the sacred meal.

The high of this celebration is engrained into the meaning behind the meal and its unique dietary restrictions. The low of this particular celebration is that Jesus has been betrayed by a friend before sitting down to eat with him. And then will be betrayed again shortly after eating.

Jesus still invites all of his disciples to eat with him. And he invites us to eat with him. To be in a relationship with him. Jesus gave his disciples instructions to find the spot for that evening’s meal. Jesus gives us instructions, too. Instructions that lead to our opening ourselves to him and to other people, even when they may hurt us. Trust that he never will.

**Prayer:** Blessed Jesus, you are the cornerstone of my faith: help that to be true. You have lived through highs and lows and you are with me in the highs and the lows, help me to know that completely. Amen.

*Pastor Katherine has been to three Seders in her life and those three meals were all memorable, partly for the people she ate with and partly for the way it connected her to thousands of years of history. What meals have been memorable to you?*



**Sunday, April 5: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

**Blessed are...**

*“Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.  
Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart”*

*- Psalm 119:1-2*

What is it about Jesus that draws us to Him - his love for all humanity no matter what their circumstances (rich, poor, clean, dirty, exemplary citizens, criminal)? He healed the sick, taught us how to live, gave us a taste of how much God the Father loves us and just how far God will go to show His love for us. We should show our love to Him and to others as we try to walk in His ways.

In his day, Jesus was rebuked, rejected, misunderstood, and killed by the same people who initially followed Him. Are we those people?

Years ago, I drifted from the Church. Was I one of those people? I realized later that I did not understand what Jesus was all about until I started to study God’s word as led by learned Clergy. If you are in the same circumstance, isn’t it about time you listened to His teachings and contemplate His walk on this earth and giving up of His life to ensure everlasting life for us?

**Prayer:** Lord, open my heart to the teaching of your Son and help me to follow His commandments to us to love you with all our heart, mind and soul and to love others as ourselves. I ask it in His name. Amen.

*George South is one of the regular members of the 8:30 AM Bible Study on Sunday mornings.*



**Monday, April 6: Psalm 36:5-11**

**The Spiritual Practice of Centering Prayer**

The practice of Centering Prayer (also known as Christian meditation) is to create a mantra to focus yourself on as you spend several minutes in stillness and quiet. This mantra is repeated slowly with the breath pattern.

Today, please read through Psalm 27 and select a verse that stands out to you. Then find a comfortable seat in a quiet space (if you can). Once you are comfortable, spend as long as you have time (at least 5 minutes) slowly repeating this verse or phrase to yourself. Perhaps the first half of the verse or phrase while you inhale and the second half while you exhale.

If your mind begins to travel elsewhere during this process, that's okay. Just return to your verse and continue. Once you feel more centered, calm, connected to the divine, end your centering prayer with the Lord's Prayer (below).

**Psalm 36:5-11**

- <sup>5</sup> But your loyal love, LORD, extends to the skies;  
your faithfulness reaches the clouds.
- <sup>6</sup> Your righteousness is like the strongest mountains;  
your justice is like the deepest sea.  
LORD, you save both humans and animals.
- <sup>7</sup> Your faithful love is priceless, God!  
Humanity finds refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- <sup>8</sup> They feast on the bounty of your house;  
you let them drink from your river of pure joy.
- <sup>9</sup> Within you is the spring of life.  
In your light, we see light.
- <sup>10</sup> Extend your faithful love to those who know you;  
extend your righteousness to those whose heart is right.
- <sup>11</sup> Don't let the feet of arrogant people walk all over me;  
don't let the hands of the wicked drive me off.

**Prayer:** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.



**Tuesday, April 7: John 12:20-36**

**Big Question Marks**

*“Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.*

*Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.”*

*-John 12:25-26*

The Sunday morning Bible study is always a time of great discussion and exploration as several different adults come together to look at the Word of God together. On the day when the group discussed John 12:20-36 several verses stood out as big question marks. The two highlighted above were two of the biggest question marks.

The point was raised: does Jesus want us to be miserable? After some really thought-provoking conversation, one of the bible study members said, “hating something means you want to change it.” When verse 25 mentions people hating their life in this world, it can mean feeling the need to change a part of their life. Wanting a different kind of life. A life based on Christ rather than the things the world values. What do you think about this interpretation of hate? Does it resonate with you: when you really hate something, you want to change it versus if you just dislike something, there isn’t a push to make it change.

In verses 26, there seems to be an in/out dichotomy. And one of the bible study members thought this was incongruous with their understanding of the Christian message of Jesus’ love for everyone. We all sat with that for a while when someone else drew our attention to verse 32 when Jesus says that he will draw **all people** to himself. How do these two verses explain or develop one another? There was no clear-cut answer by the end of our time together, but just the acknowledgment that Scripture can’t be read in a vacuum or alone.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus loves to talk, and this passage is no different. The questions to ask yourself are: are there ways that I can focus more on other people (as Jesus constantly does in the Gospels)? Are there ways that Christ is welcoming me to follow him?

**Prayer:** Holy Jesus, you came to this world to draw all people to yourself and yet some of the things you say can be so confusing. Help me to understand your whole message of loving God and loving neighbor in a fuller way today and every day. In your name, Amen.

*The Sunday morning Bible Study meets almost every Sunday at 8:30 in the Library (off of Fellowship Hall). It is lead by Pastor Greg most of the time, with Pastor Katherine subbing in occasionally. It is always over before the 10:00 service begins.*



**Wednesday, April 8: John 13:21-32**

**Love One Another**

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*

*- John 13:34-35*

*“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”*

*- Romans 13:8*

Five girlfriends and I got together in Florida for a long weekend this January. We have known one another, our siblings and parents, since middle school when we all sang in the church choir together. We have followed and supported each other through triumphs and challenges. But every time we get together we realize that there is more to learn about one another – and ponder over how to fit the new pieces of information into our perceptions - and often, how to make room for new insights. One of us had buried both her in-laws that year and in cleaning out their home found some disturbing news. When she had married her husband, he was divorced with two little boys, and he had primary custody. My friend willing raised and loved his kids and she and her husband had two more boys of their own. The papers she found proved that her husband was not the father of either of the first two boys! We listeners were stunned. Questions swirled in our heads. Did your husband know he wasn't their father? Did the boys know that the man they had called Daddy all their lives was not their biological father? Who needs to know this information now? How does my friend feel about being tricked into raising kids that were not her husband's? What were her in-laws thinking when they made the decision – a secret forced adoption of sorts - without consulting her and her husband? Were they thinking that she and her husband would give these kids the best home and the most love? Did they? Could they still? Lots to pray about.

**Prayer:** Dear gracious and all-knowing God - keep us focused on loving one another and not the circumstances.

*Lyle Landon and her husband Dan are the proud parents of three grown-up children: Chelsea, Phil, and Lucie. They have been part of the PCUM family for many years now.*





Thursday, April 9: 1 Corinthians 11:23-36

**Communion/Eucharist/Lord's Supper**

*"...that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is a new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink of it, in remembrance of me.'"*

*-1 Corinthians 11:23b-25*



*Image: a table set for a Passover Seder—the meal that Jesus would have celebrated as his Last Supper.*

What feeling does this image invoke in you? Is it what you would expect for a passage on communion? What special meals are part of your life? Jesus is there in those meals, too.

**Prayer:** Amazing God, you made a new covenant with us so that we could be your people. Thank you for your life, your ministry, your death, and your resurrection. Thank you for facing death so that we can have life in and with you. Amen.

*Pastor Katherine loves Maundy Thursday because of the intimate experience and moment that it represents for our faith and for our God. Hopefully, you are able to share a meal with your family or friends during the next few days, as a reminder of the familial relationship Jesus brings to the whole world.*

**Friday, April 10: John 18:1-19:42**

**Good Friday**

*“When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”*

*- John 19:30*

Good Friday is an oxymoron. I always thought it was. How can the day when Jesus was brutally assassinated be called “good?” I still think this, though I understand that it is ‘good’ in the fact that through his death, Christ took our sin, the ways that we give into temptation and turn away from God, upon himself to erase the gap between God and humanity fully. This ending is a great thing and it seems that the early church named this day Good Friday because of what came from this day.

But the people living through Good Friday would not have thought it was good. Jesus, their teacher, their friend, their hope, their messiah was found guilty of political insurgence and was killed in one of the worst ways possible in the Roman empire.

As an introspective person, every year I try to live into this sadness of Good Friday—even though I know the miraculous moment on Sunday is coming—I try my best to live into the grief that his followers must have had on Friday and Saturday. Oxymorons have a place in our faith, just as confusing biblical passages have a place in our faith. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we hopefully gain insight into the mystery that is God throughout our lives.

**Prayer:** God, at the end of Holy Week, on this Good Friday, help me to be aware of you. Help me to know the sadness and the joy of this week. You lived through such pain and sorrow. You lived through such joy and connection. Be with me as I experience these things, too. Amen.

*Pastor Katherine invites you to sit and spend some time in the sorrow of Christ’s death today, the day the church recognizes the first half of an unbelievable miracle. Spend time connected to the whole body of Christ today.*



**Saturday, April 11: Matthew 27:57-66**

### **Silence and Stillness**

*“So Joseph [of Arimethea] took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own tomb. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.”*

*-Matthew 27:59-61*



Holy Saturday is a day of silent reflection, a time to be still and to ponder the magnitude of what has happened during the past week and what will happen in just a day from now. We are not quite ready for the Hallelujahs of Easter Sunday. This is a time to take in the silence and the stillness of the tomb; a time to reflect on the great gift that we have been given; a time to assess our readiness for discipleship. This is a day to think about the type of disciple that we are in the present and to discern the kind of disciple that we are called to be. While reading today's New Testament passage, reflect on these questions:

- Am I the disciple that would sit at the tomb and watch and wait like Mary Magdalene and the “other” Mary?
- Am I the disciple who would go before Pilate and ask for Jesus' body so that I could prepare Him for burial?
- What type of disciple is God calling me to be in this moment in time?

As Holy Week comes to an end and you reflect upon the week that has passed, spend a bit of time in a quiet space where you can escape from the many responsibilities that you have coming up for Easter Sunday. You may want to light a candle or use a finger labyrinth or both. <https://labyrinthociety.org/download-a-labyrinth>

Focus on the answers to your questions above and be still and silent for just a few moments. If you feel so inclined, listen to Phil Wickham's song “Living Hope” on YouTube as you ponder God's Word.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-1fwZtKJSM&list=RDu-1fwZtKJSM&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-1fwZtKJSM&list=RDu-1fwZtKJSM&start_radio=1)

**Prayer:** Gracious and Holy God, help me to accept the pain and suffering of Jesus' death, so that I may be able to sing Hallelujahs on Easter morning. Thank you for your love of me and help me to be the disciple that you have called me to be. Amen.

*Mary Beckhusen is the Director of Christian Education here at PCUM. She first joined the staff in 2014 and has loved being part of this joyous and loving community of faith.*



## Sunday, April 12: John 20:1-18

### Shock and Awe

*“But Mary [Magdalene] stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet... Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.”*

-John 20: 11-12 and 18

On that first Easter morning, Jesus’ followers had no idea what to expect. None. Even though Jesus had predicted his death three times, his disciples and followers had no idea what was to come after burial.

Yes, they had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the death, but there was no one like Jesus who could raise him. When the women went to the tomb at daybreak on Sunday (the day after the Sabbath), they expected to find a body. They expected to see Jesus’ lifeless corpse and they were going to continue all of the burial rituals that didn’t get finished because of the start of the Sabbath, at night fall on Friday.

But, as we know, they didn’t find a body. Instead they found an empty tomb. This was so shocking that Mary Magdalene, who had witnessed Jesus’ death on the cross and followed him to his tomb, didn’t recognize his risen self. She was in shock and awe of the whole situation.

And perhaps that is what Easter morning is meant to be. A day of shock and awe for the power and grace of our God. Our God who loves us beyond imagining. Our God who sent God’s Son to be the Savior of the world. Our God who yearns for us to be part of God’s own story and family. Our God who loves you and me and the person who gets on your last nerve at work or school or on your drive. Our God, Jesus, came down to this world to live a life, to minister to us, to die for us, and to rise for us. Jesus Christ broke the normal boundary of life and death so that we could be restored to God and made part of God’s family.

In our shock and awe today, we proudly proclaim: Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

**Prayer:** O Risen Christ, you have risen from the grave and have come to proclaim that death doesn’t have the last word. But that light sure does. You meet me wherever I am and come alongside me wherever I go. Thank you for your gift of love and life. Amen.

*Pastor Katherine hopes that this devotional was a beneficial daily practice for you on your Lenten journey this year. Thank you for being part of this congregational exploration of faith, stories, and Scripture. Christ is Risen! Amen and amen!*