

Reflections on Perseverance and Peace

Spring Devotional 2021



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The Pastoral Care Department has developed this devotional booklet with the theme of perseverance and peace after reflecting on the context of a pandemic that has brought many changes in individuals' lives and in our communities over the past 12 months. Despite these challenges, the pandemic has shined a spotlight on our strengths and the many ways in which we come together to provide help and hope to others.

While we use the word “resilience” to describe our ability to bend and not break under the weight of many challenges, the Biblical word for this is “perseverance.” It refers to the ability to continue despite difficulty or obstacles. We have certainly faced difficulties and obstacles, but we have continued to fight COVID-19 and we have made great strides in overcoming it.

George Santayana once famously said, “Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.” It is also true that what we learn from the past, and from the challenges that face our generation, could have enormous implications for a better world. The Great Plague, which was the Bubonic Plague mixed with a few other outbreaks like Smallpox and Anthrax, began to ravage the medieval world in 1346 and continued to 1353. I commend the Roku TV Great Courses series, “The Black Death,” to you, if you like learning about history. This particular history is poignantly applicable to our time. By the time the Bubonic Plague swept across the world from the east to the west, and then back to the east, over 60 million people had died worldwide.

We have learned much since then about fighting highly contagious deadly diseases. Historians even believe that the horrendous scourge of the fourteenth century actually gave rise to the Enlightenment, as people sought to understand and overcome what had befallen them. As we continue to endure the challenges this plague has brought, this Devotional booklet is a gift to help your spirit draw strength from God. May we continue to find new ways to fight disease and new ways to be human together that enlighten and transform.

The Rev. Emily Rosencrans

Director, Network Pastoral Care Services

The Pastoral Care Department of St. Luke's Hospital wishes you and yours a meaningful season of Lent. If you desire to speak with a chaplain, please contact us at 314-542-4748. You may also tell any staff member if you wish to speak to a chaplain and they will contact us.

ASH WEDNESDAY: THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Ash Wednesday is the first day of the forty-day season of Lent, which ends on the day before Easter.

Ash Wednesday gets its name from the old custom of marking the forehead with ashes as a sign of penitence. Ashes have historically been a symbol of mourning, grief, humiliation and repentance. Old Testament Jews used to wrap themselves in sackcloth and sit in ashes to show how miserable they were over their sins or their misfortunes.

In a variety of Christian churches, the faithful go to church on Ash Wednesday to have the priest/pastor mark their forehead with a small smudge of ashes. The ashes are obtained from burning the palms saved from the previous year's Palm Sunday's liturgy. If you stop to think about it, the image is extraordinary. The very palm branches that were used to salute Christ as King are burned and used to remind us of how far we have fallen short.

(Jonah 3: 6; II Samuel 13: 9; Jeremiah 6: 26; see also Luke 10: 13)

The ashes can be a reminder to us of the smudge on our souls—have we been selfish, prideful, vain, greedy, lazy, hateful, vengeful, malicious, emotionally or physically abusive or otherwise un-Christ-like? The ashes can also remind us of the hard spiritual work yet to be done, with God’s help, through prayer, fasting and other works of love and reconciliation.

We are called to be faithful to the One who loves us and gave His earthly life for us. Those who engage in the imposition of ashes regard this ritual as an appropriate way to begin a most solemn and penitential season.

Did you know that observing 40 days during Lent began in medieval history just as the storehouses were most empty, and before the spring crops took root? It was also when meat was in short supply. So virtue was born of necessity, as people began to fast and give up meat for these 40 days. Whether we fast, or give something up, or take up something good, as Christians, we do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Use the following guide to help you ponder the meaning of each day’s verse(s).

Lectio Divina means divine reading. It is an ancient method for studying and contemplating the message of scripture. It is a way of listening for what God reveals to us through God’s Word.

Set aside 5-10 minutes for your devotion. Get rid of all distractions (no music, no television, no interruptions). Setting aside the same time and going to the same place each day is helpful.

Take several deep, cleansing breaths. This relaxes your body and quiets your spirit. As you inhale, imagine you are breathing in God’s Spirit. As you exhale, imagine you are exhaling stress, tension, and anything distressing or anxiety producing.

Read the text for the day. Spend 1-2 minutes pondering whatever **WORDS** or **PHRASES** stand out to you.

Read the text a second time. Spend 1-2 minutes noticing your **THOUGHTS** and **FEELINGS** relative to the text.

Read the text a third time. This time contemplate how God is speaking to you through this text. How will this realization change how you live today? Give thanks to God.

A PRAYER FOR ASH WEDNESDAY FROM PSALM 51:

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me...

“You desire truth in the inward being; therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow...

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit.”

Joel 2: 1-2, 11-14a

¹*“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill.*

Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming.

It is close at hand –

² *a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness.*

Like dawn spreading across the mountains

a large and mighty army comes,

Such as never was in ancient times

nor ever will be in ages to come.

¹¹*The LORD thunders at the head of his army;*

His forces are beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys his command.

The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

¹²*“Even now,” declares the LORD*

“return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

¹³*Rend your heart and not your garments.*

Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate,

Slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

¹⁴*Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing—”*

“The day of the Lord” is a theme throughout scripture. It refers to a time of reckoning, an event that is cataclysmic, that tests us in every way. Battling a worldwide pandemic has certainly tested all of us in many ways.

The message of this passage is to return to the source of our strength, that which gives life, that which gives meaning, that which sustains us.

In my life, whenever I return to God by focusing on prayer, meditation, and reading scripture, I am re-oriented according to God’s will and purpose for my life. It is as I stay close to my Lord and Savior that I can do all things.

– Emily Rosencrans

Wednesday, February 17 – Chaplain Amelia McCown

Exodus 18: 23

“If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.”

This verse particularly demands being interpreted in its context. Read vv. 13-23 and you will see that Moses was being told that he would be able to endure and the people would live in peace only if he let go of co-dependent relationships and leadership responsibilities that were not necessary. Instead of delegating, he had taken on the task of judging all the disputes of the people himself. His father-in-law warned him that he would exhaust himself doing this and so advised that he share this role with other capable persons. The promise is, “*If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace*” (NRSV—Italics mine).

When we must bear the load of leadership of our children, our work area or our world alone, God will give us even extraordinary strength. But God often provides others to help lighten the burden. Do you long for more peace in your life? Take stock of the tasks and roles that are part of your life. Ask God if God is commanding you to delegate or otherwise let others help you. Run away from exhaustion and burn out! Remember what Jethro and what many other wise people in history have known: Often the only way to be able to stand the strain and truly take care of others is to empower others to be leaders and teach people how to help themselves with their problems instead of depending on you to do it for them.

Thursday, February 18 –*The Rev. Renita Heinzl*

Galatians 6: 9

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

Weary. A word many of us can appreciate more fully since COVID-19. I hear people talk of their weariness with the virus and its impact on them. Weariness in body from the physical exhaustion they feel as they care for critically ill patients. Weariness in mind from the emotional stress and grief this virus has brought upon them and their loved ones. Weariness in spirit as they struggle to remain connected to that which provides meaning and value in their lives.

I, too, am weary at times. No one is “immune” from the disruption this virus has brought into our lives. Yet I am also humbled by the spirit of perseverance our team members exhibit as we forge on through this “season” of life and wait and hope for peace, a return to “normalcy” in whatever form that may take.

I am aware that hope and peace look different for each of us. Then I saw January’s front cover of *Around St. Luke’s*. On it was a picture of a COVID-19 vaccine vial with the caption underneath, *“Hope has arrived.”* Who would have thought that hope would come in the form of a vial? That it might symbolize relief from the weariness for which this world has been yearning?

A stanza in the song, “O Holy Night” by Placide Cappeau, captures this well:

*“Oh holy night, the stars are brightly shining. . . . A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.”*

Indeed, this promise of hope and peace is helping us “reap” strength as we persevere in “sowing” the seeds of exceptional care in the lives of those we serve.

Friday, February 19 –*Emily Rosencrans*

2 Corinthians 4: 8

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

A year ago on this day I had no idea the news of a new virus would become something so all encompassing. I interviewed here at St. Luke’s Hospital on February 17 of 2020 and I was offered a position on Ash Wednesday, which was February 25, 2020. I spent several days in prayer, discerning God’s will and direction for my life. It was a hard decision because I was leaving a position I loved, with friends and colleagues I valued, in a place that had become sacred to me.

But St. Louis is home, it is where my extended family is, and I felt God gently urging me to come back to my motherland but in a new way, in a new place, here at St. Luke’s. I answered God’s call to come to St. Luke’s in early March, and then everything I counted on began to shift. It was a frightening time to relocate, to sell a home, to buy a home, and to begin a new job.

Keeping up with COVID has become our primary focus in healthcare. I have seen great affliction and crushing losses. I have watched those of you on the front lines day after day, fighting to save lives. I have found this new terrain perplexing, overwhelming, and yet. . . and yet. . .

I have also seen how we have risen to the challenge, changed our practice of medicine, and learned things we did not know a year ago. Our nation and our world have raced to develop a vaccine, and now we are making it available to millions of people.

We have been struck down, but we have not been destroyed. Nothing will separate us from the love of God. . . nothing. . . not now. . . not ever. We are more resilient, more creative and more wondrous than any of us could have possibly imagined. *Praise be to God!*

Saturday, February 20 – *Chris Foeldi, Dir. of Adult Faith Ministries,
Ascension Catholic Church Lay Eucharistic Minister, St. Luke's Hospital*

Romans 12:2

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Be not afraid, for the power of God's love overcomes all darkness! Yes, this verse that speaks of overcoming evil is about love. What is the correlation between love and evil? Nothing. In fact, evil is that which impedes or distorts the truly good. For example, if our health is failing, we can understand this as evil because it isn't what ought to be. We are all created in God's image to be healthy and whole. This is the truly good. In fact, God's will for us reveals the path to eternal happiness. Someday, this path leads to an everlasting love where there are no imperfections, no obstacles, no pain and no suffering. What is left? Happiness and love. Our eyes need to remain focused on God because He is our hope. Often, we find God conveying this love through our loved ones and sometimes even in sublime ways such as a smile from a stranger or something else that we consider a beautiful light amidst a moment of darkness. When we find ourselves facing a momentary trial, it is vital that we remember how God's love is the light that destroys all darkness. If we look carefully, we will find this light in the least expected places. When that happens, be thankful because God is loving you.

Sunday, February 21 – *Chaplain Jim Eckhardt*

Philippians 4: 13

“I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.”

Sign me up! There is a certainly an appeal for a faith that offers superpowers. Who would not want the ability to do anything anywhere anytime? As great as this sounds, we should look a bit closer. Is Paul really suggesting he had been given the ability to do virtually anything through Christ's strength? He did his share of miracles, but there are a couple of things we should remember about Paul before we claim this verse.

Paul came from a life of ease and prominence, he was influential in Jewish religious circles. After his experience with Christ on road to Damascus he was radically changed. Some, especially the clergy of his day, were not impressed with the new Paul nor his new message. Amongst Israelite leaders, he soon became one of the most hated men in Rome. Friends abandoned him in prison and he received unlawful punishments, including being whipped publically and pummeled with rocks, all for living out his faith. Christ gave Paul the strength to endure what he otherwise could not. Paul wrote to the Philippians from the context of hardship, loneliness, even hunger. From that place, he says he can press on because he is being strengthened by Christ.

Christ also gives us strength to press on during trials and difficult seasons of life. Whatever hardship you are facing, drawing strength from Christ, you will be able to “do all things through Christ who strengthens you.” Much more than ever imagined you could do on your own.

Monday, February 22 –*Renita Heinzl*

I Corinthians 13: 7-8a

*“Love bears all things, believes all things, **hopes** all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”*

When I was shopping with friends one day as a young teen, I was in a gift shop looking at various decorative plaques, one of which had this scripture on it. I had never heard this quote before and found it simply lovely, so I bought it and gave it to my parents. What captivated me was the idea that an emotion-love-had such staying power.

It has been many years since I first encountered this scripture verse. Since then, I have explored the meaning of love from different perspectives. I have used my insights gleaned in my sermons. I have read, and heard this scripture read, at weddings and funerals. This scripture has brought tears of comfort in times of sorrow and tears of joy in times of celebration to many as we navigate the journey of life and faith. What I have learned is that these words provide a depth of comfort because such love transcends our imagination and human capacity, and empowers us to bear, believe, hope, and endure all things, no matter the circumstance.

God’s unconditional love for us knows no limits. Wrapped in this promise that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God, we bear, believe, hope, and endure. We persevere, in other words—in all things, including in our ministry of healing. With every vital sign we take. With every room we clean. With every breathing treatment we administer. With every machine we repair. With every medicine we give. With every procedure we perform. With every visitor we assist. With every grieving family we comfort. With every tear we dry. With every prayer we offer. With every life we touch. For truly, love never ends.

Tuesday, February 23 *Jim Eckhardt*

I Chronicles 16: 11

“Seek the Lord and his strength, seek God’s presence continually.”

When I was in seminary, I remember coming home one afternoon when my daughter was about two. I opened the door into the living room and saw her playing with all her toys. The entire floor was covered, and Lizzy was sitting near the middle playing with one of the toys. She was our first child as well as the first grandchild, so she not only had a lot of toys, but they were the best toymakers had to offer.

When she looked up and saw me open the door, her face lit up, she squealed “daddy” and began to crawl toward me. As she plowed through the pile passing all the stuffed animals, some toys flashed colorful lights others began to play music or make animal noises. Nothing distracted her, she arrived at my leg and began to pull herself up. Once she steadied herself, she looked up into my eyes and held her arms up. When I lifted her up, she pressed her face onto mine.

I felt like the most important thing in her entire world. She had the best toys money could buy but she crawled past them all to be with me.

It can be challenging to seek God continually; life offers so many distractions. Most distractions are not bad in and of themselves, we need to work, we need to eat, we need to have friendships and more intimate relationships. But we can get out of balance when we seek other things more than we seek the Lord. When we find those other things, we tend to put our confidence and trust in them rather than in the Lord. Seek the Lord and His strength; seek God’s presence continually.

Wednesday, February 24 – Jim Eckhardt

Romans 12: 12

*“Rejoice in **hope**, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”*

Rejoice in **hope**

Be **patient** in tribulation

Be constant in **prayer**

No matter what our circumstances, Paul reminds us of our eternal hope. No matter what happens to us, we have something far greater waiting for us when we reach the end of our earthly journey.

Thursday, February 25 – Susan Toben, St. Joseph, Manchester

Lay Eucharistic Minister, St. Luke’s Hospital

Isaiah 40: 2

“God gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.”

God on the Bookrack

It just happened to catch my sight as I glanced across my room—GOD. I quickly looked back to see the word boldly imprinted across the cover of a book on the rack under a side table. Forgotten magazines were disheveled around and atop the book so that only the one word of its title was visible—GOD. Just a word? Or, linked together with experience, an encounter?

We have heard many words over the past year, most of which have not been altogether active in our vocabulary. Words like pandemic, illness, masks, first responders, healthcare heroes, COVID counts, vaccine development and quarantine have brought us into an encounter with the unknown of worldwide crises. At the same time, we also have dealt with words such as red, blue, divided, antagonistic, impeachment, voter fraud and violence in our political and social realities. All these expressions have tried to catch our glance as their corresponding images blazed across our television screens. Linked together, they have played out into the real experience of loss – of family, friends, confidence, trust, employment, and security.

But, there are other words, maybe not as obvious, that we also might not have employed as often in the past—courage, tenacity, compassion, strength, dauntless. . . . faith, hope, love. These words, linked together with experience, have become an encounter with Truth. *“God gives power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength.”* Isaiah 40:20

I walked over to the bookrack, rearranged the magazines, pulled out the book and began The Encounter with GOD.

James 1: 12

“Blessed is the one who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

“Blessed is the one...”

Some Christians believe that any kind of difficulty or hardship is at best punishment for sin or worse, a curse from Satan or even God. It seems to make sense and yet this verse as well as others state we are blessed through trials and difficulties. Rather than curses they are in fact blessings from God with great purpose.

“who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test,”

Except for misery, trial and hardships do not have much to offer unless we persevere under them. If we melt in the heat of the fire, then we are much like the dross that the trial is meant to cleanse from us. But if we remain steadfast and allow God to burn off what is not of him, we can be purified through trials and hardships. Remember we can call on Christ to strengthen and help us, especially in tough times. In this way, God uses difficulties to increase our trust in Him, our ability to lean on Him, and to navigate whatever difficulties we encounter.

“he will receive the crown of life ...”

“The crown of life” is most likely to be another term for abundant life, eternal life, and heavenly reward.

“which God has promised to those who love him.”

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37). He said that the whole law is summed up in this one command, especially combined with loving your neighbor as yourself. For those who love the Lord, there is the promise of the “crown of life.”

God blesses us with opportunities to grow in our faith. They often come disguised as trials and difficulties. When we persevere (by depending on God) we live out our love for the Lord and have the promise/hope of an abundant life here and an eternal reward when this life is over.

Adapted from: Connectus.org

John 16: 33

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Jesus never promised us a rose garden; he never said life would be easy. In fact, he warned that we would have tribulation.

Stories will be told for years to come about the tribulation some of you have experienced and continue to experience since this pandemic began. I imagine there are other troubles you are experiencing as well. Knowing what you are up against, Jesus says, *“take heart!”* This means: Have courage! The French word for heart is *coeur*, which is the root of our word courage. No matter what we go through, God is with us. Jesus also tells us how the story is going to end, and that everything will be okay. He said, *“for I have overcome the world.”*

God has already overcome everything and anything that might come against us.

Sunday, February 28 – *Emily Rosencrans*

2 Thessalonians 3: 16

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.”

Peace is an elusive thing. Just when you think you are at peace, something can take it away. Only the Lord of Peace can help us have peace at all times in every way. This kind of peace passes understanding. It is not dependent on our circumstances but sees beyond them. It comes from keeping our eyes on the Lord of Peace, not on the storms and tempests that threaten to undo us.

Once when Jesus and the disciples were on a boat a great storm rose up. Jesus was asleep. The disciples woke him up. He said, “Peace, be still.” And even the wind and the waves obeyed him.

People say many of us will have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after this pandemic is over. Jesus says, “Peace, be still.” We can say to our minds, “Peace, be still.”

Begin to say to yourself now, “I will heal . . . I will recover . . . this too shall pass.”

Monday, March 1 – *S Sharon Mertzluft*

Vice President and Executive Director, Office of Development, Marketing and Community Affairs

Isaiah 26: 3

“You keep us in perfect peace as our mind is focused on you, because we trust in you.”

This passage shows us the prophet Isaiah rehearsing a song of trust in the provision of God and speaks to the day of redemption and restoration in which all who believe in God will be covered with His blanket of peace. This passage speaks to me at the level of daily life. How many times have I/we procrastinated in taking a first step or the next step, just waiting for the timing, circumstances or desired outcome of an opportunity or situation to be perfect? Trusting in what could be, and thinking that peace will come only in a perfect setting may create a chasm of loss in the discernment and living of God’s plan for us.

It has been very hard at times over the past several months to keep our minds in a state of peace. Fighting COVID-19 and keeping our patients, team members and communities safe have been and continue to be our focus. In moments of respite, we have sought peace of mind and peace around us. Isaiah reminds us that placing our trust in God brings peace in our lives and enables us to be instruments of His peace to others.

Tuesday, March 2 –*Renita Heinzl*

Matthew 5: 9

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”

I am a peacemaker. Always have been, always will be. As we read in 1 Corinthians, each of us has special gifts and talents from God. I have been learning over the years that my gift—calling, if you will—is to create a sacred space where people can give voice to what is important to them while honoring each other as we enjoy the gift of abundant life together in peace.

Being a peacemaker certainly has its blessings and challenges and is a dynamic not always understood or valued by others. Thomas Merton, a spiritual leader, wrote, “Ultimately there is no friend who can fully understand us, who can walk with us all the way. We must go forward and walk on our own in response to who we are and who we are called to be in God.”

As I grow “older and wiser,” and with these words in mind, I continue on my journey to embrace who I am and whose I am. *The Prayer of St. Francis* below is a gift to me in this. It helps me understand and put into words how I live out my calling as a peacemaker in my ministry of healing every day, and I am grateful.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.	O Divine One, grant that I may not so much seek
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.	To be consoled...as to console.
Where there is injury—pardon.	To be understood...as to understand.
Where there is doubt—faith.	To be loved...as to love.
Where is despair—hope.	For it is in giving that we receive.
Where there is darkness—light.	It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned.
Where there is sadness—joy.	It is in dying...that we are born to eternal life.

Wednesday, March 3 –*Emily Rosencrans*

Romans 12: 18

“If possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

As far as it depends on you... I have learned that I have no control over anyone or anything. I once went on a hot air balloon ride in Napa, California. I asked the pilot, Gretchen, where we were going and when we would get there. She said, “Control is an illusion in life. We go where the wind takes us and stop when we decide to stop, based on the weather, the wind, and the terrain below us. I let go of my need for control and let the wind take me on a beautiful journey. A crew on the ground followed us to help us disembark when we landed.

As far as it depends on me... I can choose how I react, what I say, what I do, in order to live in peace and be at peace. This reminds me of the Serenity Prayer, written by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, of Union Theological Seminary, in 1951. It is often associated with Alcoholics Anonymous, because it has helped many thousands of people struggling to overcome an addiction.

*“God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference”*

Thursday, March 4 – *Chaplain Nathan Burgell*

Colossians 3: 15

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

There are many parts of a ballpoint pen. There is the ink, the spring, the plastic holding everything together. What if the spring is not working? You will be unable to write something. The entire pen will no longer work correctly. A ballpoint pen needs all its parts to work properly. A spring may be unnoticed and appear unimportant, but without it, the pen does not work.

Each of us has a purpose. Without us, our hospital and our mission of healing will not work correctly. Take joy in your work and know that you are important. You help keep this hospital running no matter what your job.

Friday, March 5 – *Renita Heinzl*

John 14: 27

“Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world give do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

When I was coming home the other night from work, I heard a report on the radio that caught my attention. It was an interview with an ICU physician working in a COVID-19 unit at a hospital in the northeast. He has a wife and two little children at home—two boys ages 4 and 7. He talked of how he and his family were navigating the pandemic and how their lives had changed. And of course, he named his greatest fear—bringing the virus home to his family, which hits close to home for us all. When his time came to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, he shared how he felt when he received it, as well as his children’s reactions to the good news.

When his 8 year old heard he was going to get the vaccine that day, he voiced a question full of hope, “You mean you’re getting the vaccine so you won’t get sick?” “Yes,” his father said. You could hear his child’s audible gasp of excitement at this news. Then his 4-year-old sweetly comforted him with these words, “You’ll just feel a pinch, but it won’t hurt. And you’ll be better.”

These sweet exchanges “out of the mouths of babes” capture the words of hope, fear, and troubles that many of us might be feeling. The physician choked up as he shared his story. Having persevered, when he got the vaccine he said a song from Nina Simone came to mind that gave voice to the peace receiving the vaccine gave to him and his family. Below are the first and last stanzas of the song:

*Birds flying high, you know how I feel
Sun in the sky, you know how I feel
Breeze driftin’ on by, you know how I feel
It’s a new dawn, It’s a new day
It’s a new life for me, I’m feeling good.*

*Stars when you shine, you know how I feel
Scent of the pine, you know how I feel
Oh, freedom is mine
And I know how I feel
It’s a new dawn, It’s a new day
It’s a new life for me, I’m feeling good.*

Saturday, March, 6 – *Amelia McCown*

Romans 15: 13

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

The Way It Is by *William Stafford*

“There’s a thread you follow.

It goes among things that change.

But it doesn’t change.

People wonder about what you are pursuing.

You have to explain about the thread.

But it is hard for others to see.

While you hold it you can’t get lost.

Tragedies happen; people get hurt

or die; and you suffer and get old.

Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding.

You don’t ever let go of the thread.”

For me, this thread is the trust that God’s love and grace are stronger than anything else. This knowledge gives me hope, joy and peace. What is your thread? What true and deep knowledge keeps you going even during the darkest times?

Parker Palmer’s Book, *Let Your Life Speak* is a wonderful guide for you who are looking for the meaning, purpose and joy of your life or your vocation. The queries below offered by Mr. Palmer may not bring the thread back if you have lost it—sometimes only time, prayer and/or professional guidance can do that—but I pray that these reflections on your life’s thread(s) brings you more hope, joy and peace today.

- “As I look back on my life, what’s the thread that has given me a sense of meaning and purpose? How can I name or picture it in a way that will keep me more aware of it?”
- Once I have reclaimed my lost thread and have it firmly in hand, what darkness do I need to enter and explore? For example, What fears do I need to face? What doors do I need to walk through?
- In what kinds of situations do I most often let go of the thread? How can I avoid those situations, or go into them better prepared to deal with their risks?” (<https://onbeing.org/blog/a-thread-to-guide-us/>)

Sunday, March 7 – *Amelia McCown*

1 Peter 3: 11 and Psalm 34: 14

“Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”

Legend has it that there was once a Native American elder telling his grandson about two wolves that live inside of him. One wolf is full of anger, greed, envy, impatience, self-hatred and other evils. The other wolf is full of goodness, joy, peace, and love. “Which wolf wins?” asks the boy. The reply came, “The one I feed.” Perhaps the challenge for us today is to turn away from the evil we see on our social media feeds all day. Did you catch that? These things are called “feeds”! What are they feeding you? What are your friends, your favorite tv shows and the books you read feeding you? Truth be told, there is a part of me that is drawn to some of the verbal violence and nastiness that the world wants to feed me all day long. Any yet, that is no way to live as children of the light!

Turn off the feeds or at least make them give you what will help you pursue peace. Stop filling your mind and heart with the things that are killing humanity emotionally and spiritually right now. Consciously do good every day. Seek peace—it’s not likely to find you otherwise. Feed the goodness in yourself and others. Do this and you shall live.

Monday, March 8 – *Nathan Burgell*

Galatians 5: 22

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Peace is not the absence of conflict or trouble, but it is something that lets us know that God is in control. It is easy to look at our world today with COVID-19, war, and famine and be anxious about the things that try to take away our peace. Peace is a calm understanding that God is with us in those times of trouble. One way to find peace in an unpeaceful world is to talk to God in prayer about our anxieties and fears. What can we do when worried? We pray that God will give us peace in our hearts.

Tuesday, March 9 – *Nathan Burgell*

Philippians 4: 7

“And the peace of God, which surpasses understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

This verse is used as a blessing in Christian Churches. For me it says, “Give over all your worries, hurts, anxieties, and fears over to the God of Peace.” When we hear this blessing and understand the promise of peace, all the heaviness of worry and fear in our hearts is lifted. No matter what life throws at us, we can experience peace.

When going through uncertain times resist dwelling on them and give them over to God. May God's peace flood all our hearts.

Wednesday, March 10 – *Dr. John Gaal,*

Holy Infant Parish Lay Eucharistic Minister, St. Luke's Hospital

James 3:18

“A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

The Harvest

*An eye for an eye
The wrong example, oh my
Peace cannot deny
One's fate mistaken
Communities awaken
My faith unshaken*

*Now more than ever
Sisters and brothers lever
Our Lord's endeavor*

*You reap what you sow
Within due time you'll know
Love will start to grow*

Thursday, March 11 – *Amelia McCown*

Philippians 4: 9

“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

What a thought that there is connection between our practices and experiencing the peace of God! As I ponder this I realize that much of the dis-ease I experience results from the actions of myself or others. The effects of turmoil can often be lessened or at least managed by what I choose to do with the situation. The following practices for increasing peace in your life are offered with this in mind:

- Do what is commanded in Philippians 4:8, “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (NIV)
- Reflect on the best wisdom and teachings you have received in your life. Whose practice of peace can you learn from today? Taking slow, deep, and full breaths as often as you can is a scientifically proven way to release stress. Even as you walk or go about your daily tasks, focus on breathing more fully as much as possible. Say a short breath prayer such as, “Lord Have Mercy” on the in breath and “Christ Have Mercy” on the out breath. Any single word or short phrase that you consciously breathe in and out can be a prayer . . . it is as simple as that.

Friday, March 12 – *Chris McCurdy,*

St. Anselm, Lay Eucharistic Minister, St. Luke’s Hospital

James 3: 17

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

The context of this quote is two kinds of wisdom. “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from God as Divine Wisdom.” The other type of wisdom is earthly or mortal wisdom. As humans, we are prone to self-ambition and venial sins that are against divine wisdom and not from heaven. Through God and the Holy Spirit, we have been granted the ability to be more like Christ every day. If we persevere in our faith in God, we may receive divine wisdom, as did Solomon (1 Kings 3).

Saturday, March 13 – *Amelia McCown*

Ephesians 4: 3

“Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

1 Corinthians 13:5-7 tells us that love, “does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

These days it is expected that we will rejoice when the wrong of others is discovered. This is especially true if the wrong is done by someone on the “other team” of politics, religion or nation. Evil is sensationalized. Protecting others and trusting them is considered unnecessary or outright foolish. This is why each of us must, we have to, be eager and more zealous in our pursuit of unity and peace.

Choose to not rejoice when someone is outed for their sins. Let your heart break for the pain that is caused by anything evil. Commit to protecting the dignity and the humanity of those you think are wrong. Choose to “bear with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2, ESV), always. These are indeed the ways of peace.

Sunday, March 14 – *Emily Rosencrans*

Romans 12: 17

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.”

I believe we are to honor everyone. We are even to honor those who do not honor us. God wants us to honor those with whom we disagree, those who have hurt us, those who have rejected us, those who have undermined us, those who have offended us, and even those whose actions seem to pose a threat to us.

It is possible to hold people accountable for their actions but still honor the person. It is possible to hate the sin but love the sinner. It is possible to befriend one another, speaking the truth in love. It is possible to speak directly to the one who has done something wrong, and help that person grow, instead of telling others about that person.

I believe that as we honor people, we raise them up and help them find a better way. But ultimately, it isn't about them...it's about us.

“...Give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all.”

Monday, March 15 – *Renita Heinzl*

Numbers 6: 24-26

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

My husband and I are avid hikers. There is nothing more refreshing for our souls than hiking in the remote hinterlands of Rocky Mountain National Park. Climbing mile after mile, the stresses of life begin to fall away. The beauty of God's creation envelops us as we persevere in reaching our daily goals. Cresting mountaintop after mountaintop and gazing on the remote valleys below, surrounded by nature's deafening silence, we rest. Breathe. Smile. Share stories. Eat. Drink. Pray. Give thanks.

Immersed in the majesty of the mountains, God's beauty is revealed. Feeling small, we realize we are part of something much larger than ourselves. In this “thin space,” the intersection between the human and Divine seems but a breath away. In this sacred place, we commune, for a time. We feel blessed as God's face shines upon us and gives us peace in body, mind, and spirit.

We all have our “mountain top” experiences that refuel us in our respective journeys called life. Wherever our “thin spaces” might be, I offer this prayer authored by the Medical Mission Sisters in which we can give thanks for God's gift of peace that blesses and empowers us in and for our work of healing:

“God our Mother, Living Water, River of Mercy, Source of Life, in whom we live and move and have our being, who quenches our thirst, refreshes our weariness, bathes and washes and cleanses our wounds, be for us always a fountain of life, and for all the world a river of hope springing up in the midst of the deserts of despair. Honor and blessing, glory and praise to You forever. Amen.”

Tuesday, March 16 – *Nathan Burgell*

Romans 15: 33

“May the God of peace be with you.”

This Emily Dickinson poem is short enough to quote in its entirety here. It is about the hope of peace, even when peace remains far-off:

I Many Times Thought Peace Had Come

I many times thought Peace had come
When Peace was far away—
As Wrecked Men—deem they sight the Land—
At Centre of the Sea—

And struggle slacker—but to prove
As hopelessly as I—
How many the fictitious Shores—
Before the Harbor be—

At first, the poem sounds like it is a downer with many “fictitious shores” and endless searching. However, the poem is about Hope. We eventually find this Peace after a long journey of much searching. I know that all of us will find peace. As this poem reminds us: never give up that search. Peace will be with us.

Wednesday, March 17

As chaplains, we learn to be spiritually humble and culturally sensitive. In that light, we are sharing prayers and quotations to be inclusive of reflections on perseverance and Peace from faith perspectives other than Christianity.

Heal us, Lord, and we shall be healed; save us, and we shall be saved; for it is You we praise. Send relief and healing for all our diseases, our sufferings, and our wounds; for You are a merciful and faithful healer. Blessed are you, Lord, for you heal the sick.
–Judaism

How rare are those humble beings in this world, whom the Lord tests and places in His Treasury. They rise above social status and color, and rid themselves of possessiveness and greed.
– Sikhism

It is under the greatest adversity that there exists the greatest potential for doing good, both for oneself and others.
– Christianity

O God, my only plea is my plight, all I have to offer is my lack. My intercessor is my tears, my treasure is my frailty. O my God, a drop from the ocean of your glory will suffice me. Have mercy upon me, provide me, pardon me and it will be pardoned me. Breathe on my sorrow and make glad my stress and strain by your mercy, the ever All-Merciful.
– Islam

...the Lord tests us, and blesses us with His Glance of Grace.
– Sikhism

Thursday, March 18 – *Jim Eckhardt*

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

When I was in my first year of college, I became preoccupied, almost obsessed, with knowing God’s Will for my life. I had become less enamored with the career path I had chosen and was hoping God had something better in mind. After months of prayer and Bible study I settled on one passage from the book of Romans.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2

I was looking for an answer, but instead I got a process. I was hoping God would lay out a plan for my life and all I had to do was follow the steps for everything to turn out well.

I have spent many years in this process, and it seemed that each time I got a glimpse of God’s plan for me it, I was only given the next step. Never the whole plan! Each time I was sure the step was correct, and looking back I still do not doubt. It has been a wild incredible journey thus far. I have lived and ministered in several states and more than 8 countries. I never saw that coming.

Thank You, Father, that **You know** the plans You have for me, plans for good and not for evil, and so I come to You today and pray that You would direct and govern the path that lies ahead, and show me the way that is best for me.

Loving Lord, You are our hope and our strength in time of trouble. You are our ever present help in this difficult world. Lord, I know that You hold the future in the palm of Your hands and I trust You.

Thank You, for You are always there to provide for my needs and to protect me from the storms of life. I pray that no matter what the future holds, You will remain beside me. I know Lord, that no matter how difficult things become in this world You have promised never to leave me nor forsake me. I also know that in this world we will have tribulation and trials, and I pray that You will be with me through all that I face in the future.

Source: <https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Prayers-for-the-Future#535>

Friday, March 19

Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and God will make your paths straight.”

I have walked closely with God for as long as I can remember. It has not always been easy, but it has certainly been an adventure. When I am not sure what to do or where to go, I look to God. When all else fails, I trust God. As I acknowledge the One who is the source of my life and being, the road before me becomes clear. I am only given what I need for each day, but God has never failed me nor forsaken me. Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you. It is as we stay close that the divine purpose of our life is revealed.

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord, and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night.
– *Christianity*

Saturday, March 20 – *Chaplain Tim Robinson*

Jeremiah 29: 11

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a **hope.**”*

GOD IS OUR HOPE:

When we are worried and anxious;
When we doubt and waver;
When we choose sin;
When we feel weak;
When we are tired;

GOD IS OUR HOPE

When we get too busy;
When we are sad;
When we have suffered for a long time;
When we are going through a time of change;
When we don't understand;

GOD IS OUR HOPE

When we are tired of waiting;
When things aren't working out as planned;
When we feel alone;
When we need help;
When we feel forgotten;

GOD IS OUR HOPE

When we are losing heart;
When we have a need;
When we can't let go of guilt;
When time stands still;
When eternity seems too far away;

GOD IS OUR HOPE

When we need strength for an impossible task;
When we are grieving a significant loss;
When we need a measure of God's grace;
Even when darkness feels like our best friend!

Sunday, March 21

O you who believe, seek help with patience and prayers, as God is with those who patiently persevere.

– Islam

We should all visit the sick. When they are in sorrow and suffering, it is a real help and benefit to have a friend come. Happiness is a great healer to those who are ill. In the East it is the custom to call upon the patient often and meet him individually. The people in the East show the utmost kindness and compassion to the sick and suffering. This has greater effect than the remedy itself. You must always have this thought of love and affection when you visit the ailing and afflicted.

– Bahá'í

Encountering sufferings will definitely contribute to the elevation of your spiritual practice, provided you are able to transform calamity and misfortune into the path.

– Buddhism

Monday, March 22 – *Amelia McCown*

Revelation 21:3-4 (NIV)

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.””

Meditating on Revelation 21 and 22 is one of the best antidotes for anxiety and despair that I have found. All that causes our tears. All that causes our pain. Even death itself. All of this will pass away one glorious day. The cynic and doubter in me wonders if this will really happen. But today I choose to lay aside those doubts and assume the faith of a child. After all, the kingdom of heaven belongs to those with such faith (Matthew 18:3). Like the father whose son was tormented by a demon we can cry to God, “I believe. Help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). Then we turn from our prayers into feeding our faith. We focus on our energies on simultaneously hoping in a future coming of God’s Rule, and working with God to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth right now.

To those who hold a Christian faith I would recommend the following songs as ways to inspire your hope in the promises of Revelation. One is “Is He Worthy?” written by Andrew Peterson. There are several versions online. Another encouraging tune you can find online in “No More Night” written by Bill and Gloria Gaither and David Phelps. Happy Listening!

Tuesday, March 23 – *Renita Heinzl*

James 5:11

“Indeed, we call blessed those who showed endurance.”

Mid-way into the COVID-19 pandemic, the writer and journalist, Laura Hillenbrand, wrote a piece in the New York Times (6/27/20) entitled “I Was in Love With a Tree That Swallowed the Sky.” Using the metaphor of a tree, she reflected on the convulsant change, grief, and loss the pandemic wrought on life as we know it. She also paints a powerful image of what the gift of perseverance and peace might look like in the face of such disruption.

Hillenbrand had a towering maple in her backyard that became a peaceful haven for her as she sought refuge under its leaves. She describes how the tree filled the sky and her heart with its beauty. Until the day her neighbor told her the tree was blocking his view of the mountains. She called in an arborist to trim the tree, but hid in the house on the day of as she could not bear to witness its destruction. Her heart ached with guilt and loss. When all was finished, only the central limbs remained, “grand and defiant.”

In the midst of her grief, she suddenly noticed a stunted dogwood she had never seen before as the maple had overpowered it. Then something else caught her eye. A lone blue bird landed on one of its scrawny twigs and began to sing. It returned daily, singing and preening in the evening twilight. Then one day it brought its baby as well, where they fed and sang together evening after evening.

Hillenbrand reflects on how witnessing this transformation blessed her and taught her about the power of perseverance and resilience in the journey called life.

“The maple was not gone, but reimagined, and with it, the dogwood beneath, and the whole world around them. I gazed at all this beauty, feeling my grief arrive at gratitude. . . . After these days of rending, of loss, of violence, of grief, of convulsant change, may we find a beautiful, grateful reimagining. May we land as the blue bird does, resting and peaceful.”

Wednesday, March 24

He is the compassionate, the All-Bountiful! O God, my God! Thou seest me, Thou knowest me; Thou art my Haven and my Refuge. None have I sought nor any will I seek save Thee; no path have I trodden nor any will I tread but the path of Thy love. In the darksome night of despair, my eye turnest expectant and full of hope to the morn of Thy boundless favor and at the hour of dawn my drooping soul is refreshed and strengthened in remembrance of Thy beauty and perfection. He who the grace of thy mercy aideth, though he be but a drop, shall become the boundless ocean, and the merest atom which the outpouring of Thy loving-kindness assisteth, shall shine even as the radiant star.

Shelter under Thy protection, O Thou Spirit of purity, Thou Whom art the All-Bountiful Provider, this enthralled, enkindled servant of Thine. Aid him in this world of being to remain steadfast and firm in Thy love and grant that this broken-winged bird attain a refuge and shelter in Thy divine nest that abideth upon the celestial tree.

– Babá'í Faith

Thursday, March 25 – Nathan Burgell

Matthew 6:33

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Sometimes life feels tumultuous and exhausting, especially during this past year. Make sure to take some time for yourself. Take time to breathe and collect your thoughts. Remember to take time doing something you enjoy. Take time as well in getting your hearts and minds in order. Write down lists of things you are thankful for. For example, a roof over your head. A job. Food on the table. These things may be simple, but they go a long way to focus us on the good things that God has given us.

Friday, March 26

When a man is happy he may forget his God; but when grief comes and sorrows overwhelm him, then will he remember his Father who is in Heaven, and who is able to deliver him from his humiliations. Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which, when the summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit. The laborer cuts up the earth with his plough, and from that warth comes the rich and plentiful harvest. The more a man is chastened, the greater is the harvest of spiritual virtues shown forth by him.

– Babá'í Faith

There is a saying in Tibetan, “Tragedy should be utilized as a source of strength.” No matter what sort of difficulties, how painful experience is, if we lose our hope, that's our real disaster.

– Buddhism

Saturday, March 27 (First Day of Passover) – Rabbi Laurence Glestein

Exodus 5:1

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: “Let my people go, so that they may worship me.”

Passover is a celebration of Freedom and Family. On the first two nights at the Seder, parents transmit to the next generation that The Almighty renews us with a sense of purpose and destiny that began in the dark slavery of ancient Egypt and still fills the Jew with light. There is certainty in knowing we are called upon to serve G-d, not our own whims and desires. G-d is transcendent and always there, guiding our lives and destinies. Passover is a celebration of history—the past and the future. Though we Jews always learn from our past, we simultaneously look ahead to a future of spiritual perfection when the Messiah arrives. The Psalmist writes, “How can I repay you G-D for all your kindness to me? I will raise up the cup of salvation and invoke the name of G-d.” On Passover we also declare “Give thanks to our Maker for your goodness endures forever.” We try, even in the midst of loss, to find meaning in our faith. This is a theme of Passover that still carries us as a nation, and as individuals.

A cheerful heart is a good medicine. – Judaism

Sunday, March 28 (Palm Sunday) – Emily Rosencrans

Mark 11: 1-11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, “

Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it.”

“If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’ ”

And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it.

And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?”

And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go.

And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.

And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields.

And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”

And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

God provides. Jesus was drawing near to an unimaginable end. Betrayal, rejection, abandonment, crucifixion...but God provided for him...a colt that had never been ridden...for a parade like no other...in fulfillment of prophecies spoken and written long, long before.

God provides. In ways large and small, as we have lived through an unimaginable year with unimaginable events and losses, God has provided us with minds/skills/resources to fight this virus and develop a vaccine so we will perhaps reach herd immunity. God has also provided us with hearts to care, to comfort and to console.

The Broadway Musical *HAMILTON* has a song called, “*It’s Quiet Uptown.*” These lyrics stay with me as I have witnessed the unimaginable this year:

“There are moments that the words don’t reach. There’s a grace too powerful to name.

We push away what we can never understand. We push away the unimaginable.

They are standing in the garden...she takes his hand.

Forgiveness...can you imagine?

They are going through the unimaginable.”

I have seen the unimaginable...not just unimaginable suffering and loss, but unimaginable love, acceptance and forgiveness.

I have seen people reach out to offer a grace too powerful to name...

We are witnessing and participating in the unimaginable.

So I thank God for his provision of unimaginable strength, endurance, and grace!

Monday, March 29 – Emily Rosencrans

Isaiah 53: 1-5

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

God has created us, formed us, and called us by name.
God is with us, even when we pass through raging waters and walk through devouring fires.
God says he will give the world for our ransom because we are precious, honored and loved.

It is hard to believe there are people in our world being kidnapped each and every day, some are sold into slavery, some are held for exorbitant ransoms.

We may feel that the last year has held all of us hostage. How will we ever overcome? I hold on to this promise: God has given us his son to free us from our bondage to sin and to help us overcome even death.

God will help us find a way.

Tuesday, March 30 – *Amelia McCown*

Isaiah 6:9 (NIV)

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”

Isaiah 6: 9 and the poem below most often are read at Advent. It may seem counterintuitive to celebrate the Prince of Peace and the Light of the World during Lent. The power and mystery we celebrate today is that no suffering, no darkness, no betrayal, not even death can stop the reign of peace and love of God. Today may you know God’s love and light.

“How the Light Comes” – *by Jan Richardson*

I cannot tell you how the light comes.

What I know is that it is more ancient than imagining.

That it travels across an astounding expanse to reach us.

That it loves searching out what is hidden, what is lost, what is forgotten or in peril or in pain.

That it has a fondness for the body, for finding its way toward flesh, for tracing the edges of form, for shining forth through the eye, the hand, the heart.

I cannot tell you how the light comes, but that it does. That it will. That it works its way into the deepest dark that enfolds you, though it may seem long ages in coming or arrive in a shape you did not foresee.

And so may we this day turn ourselves toward it. May we lift our faces to let it find us. May we bend our bodies to follow the arc it makes. May we open and open more and open still to the blessed light that comes.

Wednesday, March 31 – *Donna Vicini*

Lay Eucharistic Minister, St. Luke’s Hospital

Matthew 27:46, Psalm 22:1

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

How often does the cry that Jesus elicited emanate from our own hearts as a result of pain and illness, loss of former function, and even loss of life itself? We like to hold on to what is familiar, to our own life, and the lives of those we love. When we lose those things and people in our lives, feelings of abandonment can creep in.

Jesus’ expression of loss was real, but just as for the Psalmist, Jesus’ prayer was not without hope in the saving power of God. That hope was realized through Jesus’ victory over death through his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Each very real loss that one experiences, though difficult and painful, creates an opening that the Lord would like to fill with something uniquely special. That gift, designed to draw one ever closer to God, is given by a Father who loves each son and daughter more than he or she could love human life itself! God, who is Truth and Beauty, will remain always faithful to us. Let us pray together to remain faithful to Him, particularly when times can seem to be so challenging!

Thursday, April 1 (Maundy [Holy] Thursday) – Renita Heinzl

John 18: 1-9

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.”

John 13: 34-35

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday in Holy Week before Easter. According to scripture and tradition, on this day Jesus gathered with his followers and celebrated the Last Supper. The Sacrament of Holy Communion in the Christian tradition is traced back to this meal. However, on this day Jesus also gave his followers a new commandment – to love one other as he loved them – and washed their feet during the meal as a demonstration of what such love for another might look like.

My family and I always went to church on Maundy Thursday year after year and celebrated Holy Communion. And I always wondered why this day was called Maundy Thursday until I finally looked it up. I learned that “Maundy” is a Middle English word that comes from the Latin *mandatum*, meaning “command.” This, because of the command he gave to his followers to love one another as God loves us. Communing together with bread and wine and the humble act of washing feet became two ways—sacramental signs, if you will—to experience God’s love for us and live out the call to love one another as a sign of our love for God. Service, therefore, is transformed from a seemingly “ordinary” task to an “extra-ordinary” calling through which to express God’s love, which shines like a beacon of hope to all in need.

St. Luke’s mission of service in and to this community is a “light of hope” beckoning all who are weary and in search of healing and peace to come. Come and experience exceptional care through our ministry of healing. Day in and day out we “commune” and “wash feet” together through our acts of loving service with the hope of restoring health and wellness to those struggling with illness in body, mind, or spirit. Channeling our gifts and talents in service to others, we persevere, giving deeply of ourselves every day, to make a difference in this world. What greater love and acts of service express God’s love and give hope than this?

Friday, April 2 (Good Friday) – Emily Rosencrans

John 19: 16-30

“So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, ‘What I have written I have written.’

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.' This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, 'They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.' So the soldiers did these things,

But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), 'I thirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

When the worst happens, when the unspeakable occurs, we can put an end to the anguish and the inhumanity by acknowledging, "It is finished."

The most amazing thing happens when we allow it to be finished, when we let it go. It ceases to have power over us. We begin to take back our power.

It was when Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" that he was able to give up his spirit. He was fully able to let it all go. He relinquished the hideousness of it all.

And that, my friends, is when God can begin to bring life out of death and hope out of despair.

We can choose to stay in the grave, believing it is simply finished. Or we can choose to embrace that something has to die for something else to live.

Whatever has been terrible, hurtful, and wrong, say "It is finished." Let it go... move on.

Your story is not over yet... It is still being written. Someday, somehow, though you cannot see it yet...

God will bring redemption, renewal and resurrection.

Saturday, April 3 (Holy Saturday) – Emily Rosencrans

John 19: 38-42

After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body.

Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were thoughtful, cautious men, and devout Jews. They watched Jesus' ministry unfold. They asked questions. They pondered and wondered, "*Could this be the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel?*"

Sometimes we are not sure what to think until evil has done its worst, and we see the light clearly.

Emily Dickinson once said, "*the truth must dazzle gradually, or every man be blind.*"

At various times in history, people have been confused and unsure of what to believe. Somehow, the truth begins to dawn on us and we see reality, as it unfolds.

The unrest in our world in the last year has at times been confusing and many thoughtful, careful people are unsure what to believe. Throughout history, when atrocities were committed, we wonder how it could have happened. It takes time for the truth to be known and acted upon.

When evil does its worst, in the stillness that follows, good people always come forward to do the right thing. May we learn from Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus that it is never too late to show our allegiance and support for what is good. May we learn from their witness, that we do not have to make a scene, but can quietly take a stand by doing what is decent and dignified while the world waits in silence.

Sunday, April 4 (Easter Sunday)

John 20: 1-18

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, And the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus said to her, “Mary,” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.’ ”

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her. On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

**Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed!
The Lord is risen!
Alleluia! Amen!**

Most Holy God, Maker of Heaven and Earth,
We thank you for the mystery and wonder of the resurrection.
We thank you for what it means for each of us.
Just as Jesus Christ conquered sin and death, so we have life eternal through him.
We thank you for the gift of salvation, “For it is by grace we have been saved, through faith—and this is not from us, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) Amen.

HAPPY EASTER!



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