



Lent Devotional

We hope you'll follow along daily, be deepened in your faith through the words of your brothers and sisters in Christ, and prepare your heart to celebrate at Easter the new life he made possible for all.

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**PITTSBURGH
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2017

*The Rev. Dr. Cathy Brall, Director of Field Education,
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 12:1-14

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. 4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children — “My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; 6 for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.” 7 Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? 8 If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. 9 Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. 11 Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, 13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. 14 Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

DEVOTIONAL

One particularly virulent Lenten temptation is to assume that we are solely responsible for the content and results of any program of spiritual discipline we undertake during this season. If we successfully refrain from indulging in chocolate, alcohol, or whatever we promised God we would avoid, or, in contrast, successfully engage in Bible reading, prayer, or other deeds we promised we would do, then by golly, we think we've had ourselves a pretty good Lent. The danger of a “successful” Lent lies in the growth of our ego rather than growth in humility from a faithful Lent. This passage reminds us that Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. We don't initiate or continue this journey alone. A great cloud of witnesses surrounds us—saints who have trod a similar path,

sometimes stumbling, sometimes falling flat on their faces—whose prayers and testimonies encourage us to persevere. Trials and difficulties will confront us over the next 40 days—all permitted and some perhaps designed by Christ—to help us develop the peaceful fruit of righteousness and resemble our Savior in his holiness. Let us not lose heart, but rather proceed faithfully, being strengthened and healed as we walk toward Easter.

PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God, you have called into this holy season to journey with the cloud of faithful witnesses from generations past and present. Help us to follow with patience and persistence the path that Christ will set before us, trusting in His righteousness and not our own, that we may obtain the growth and transformation that you alone most desire and design in each of our lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2017

*Doris Calian, McMillan Society Member, Pittsburgh
Theological Seminary*

SCRIPTURE

John 1:29-34

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ 31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32 And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

DEVOTIONAL

In this season of Lent, we renew our baptismal vows and begin afresh our journey with Jesus. We read and listen to Christ's teachings; we are inspired by His actions of kindness, healing, putting the needs of others before His own needs. We notice and respect His continually praying and seeking strength to know and follow God's will. We tend to be students of the wondrous biblical stories. But can we be more than students? Can we reach out to use and act on what we have learned and witnessed from the example of Christ? Our actions do not earn God's love and forgiveness, but our actions are evidence of our joy and appreciation of God's gift to us. Let us step out by sharing our food, our comfort, our hospitality, and especially our love.

PRAYER

Dear God, Thank you for the gift of your Son and His sacrifice for us. Give us the guidance and the courage to follow His teachings and His example by giving ourselves to others. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 2017

*Dr. Michelle Keane Domeisen '12/'16, Board Member,
Pittsburgh Theologic* **AL SEMINARY**

Scripture

Psalms 22

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.
- 3 Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 4 In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- 5 To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- 6 But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
- 8 "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver —
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"
- 9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
- 10 On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- 11 Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
- 12 Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- 13 they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
- 14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
- 15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
- 16 For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
- 17 I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
- 18 they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
- 19 But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
- 20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
life from the power of the dog!
- 21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!
from the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
- 22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
- 23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
- 24 For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.
- 25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
- 26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!
- 27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
- 28 For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.
- 29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
- 30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
- 31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he **HAS DONE IT**.

Devotional

There are times in our lives when we cry out to God with a sense of mistrust about whether He will answer us. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The grief of the psalmist is deeply palpable, yet the call to trust permeates the plea just as much. As mired as we are in the trials that afflict us, this psalm is a source of acknowledgement that our cries are worthy but our mistrust of God to answer us is not.

When we seek this psalm for comfort, our souls walk through the reminder and the revelation that God hears and answers. In some way, in His way, He answers. And in the process of waiting for the answer, we praise Him. We will glorify God in our pain and loss because, as Christians, we have been given the grace of eternal hope **AND COMFORT**.

Prayer

Precious Lord, we cry out to you from the depths of our souls. It is in glorifying you while in the midst of our pain that we

come to understand the suffering you have experienced on our behalf. Help us always to remember to trust that you will hear and answer us in our grief. It is in your most holy name that we pray these words—You who are the Alpha and the Omega, from ages **UNTO AGES.**

SATURDAY, March 4, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Ron Cole-Turner, H. Parker Sharp Professor of Theology and Ethics, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 43

- 1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me!
- 2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy?
- 3 O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.
- 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.
- 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

DEVOTIONAL

The Psalmist uses graphic language to describe what we call depression. It is the feeling of being “cast down” from within, as though the soul itself is being pushed down. It is the sense of being “disquieted,” agitated for no good reason. For millions of people, this describes reality.

When night closes in, what should we do? Turn to God, the Psalmist seems to suggest. Does that help? Not exactly. Notice how verse 4 (I “go . . . to God my exceeding joy”) comes before verse 5 (but I am still “cast down”).

Our text offers no quick fix. Hope in God and there’s no more depression? Wouldn’t that be nice? The truth is that God is no magic pill. The dark night of the soul can be long and frightening, empty except for bitter tears.

Hope in God, not because it lifts the despair, but because sometimes it is the only thing we can do. Hope and hang on.

PRAYER

Even in my sorrow, O God, speak to me. Use my darkness to help to reveal your light. Use the empty silence within me to help me hear you. Do not let me despair without your blessing me through it all, in Christ, I pray. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2017

The Rev. Dr. John Welch '02, Vice President for Student Services and Community Engagement and Dean of Students, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:18-22

18 Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 19 Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. 21 “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”

DEVOTIONAL

Living a perfect life is not easy, and for anyone to claim that he or she does fools no one. However, living a holy life is possible, but also not easy. To live holy is to be holy; but to be holy requires an acknowledgment of the tension caused by sin. Being holy is to be sanctified, to be set apart by the Spirit of God, marked as a child of God and destined for the eternal reward in glory. But sin won’t let us forget that glory is not yet here. And so, the tension between who we should be and who we are persists. We are new creatures in sinful bodies, new wine in old wineskins, stressing the weakest parts of our very being. It’s this type of suffering we openly confess, and it’s this type of suffering we remember during the 40 days of Lent. We fast in a sense of self-denial; our parched souls seek spiritual refreshment. One day, we will be in our new wineskins.

PRAYER

Most Holy God, continue to walk with us in the midst of our tension and show us your grace. You reminded us that our suffering is not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall later be revealed, but the journey is nonetheless difficult.

Thank you for Calvary, and the cross, the symbol of our freedom.

MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Jerome F. D. Creach, Robert C. Holland Professor of Old Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 119:73-80

- 73 Your hands have made and fashioned me;
give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.
- 74 Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice,
because I have hoped in your word.
- 75 I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right,
and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.
- 76 Let your steadfast love become my comfort
according to your promise to your servant.
- 77 Let your mercy come to me, that I may live;
for your law is my delight.
- 78 Let the arrogant be put to shame,
because they have subverted me with guile;
as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.
- 79 Let those who fear you turn to me,
so that they may know your decrees.
- 80 May my heart be blameless in your statutes,
so that I may not be put to shame.

DEVOTIONAL

I suspect few modern Christians have ever read Psalm 119 closely. One reason for that is it is simply so long and so repetitive. It has 176 verses that seem to go over the same ground again and again. But more off-putting than that is the subject: the Law and its benefits. Many readers will undoubtedly say, "But I thought we were freed from the Law" (Gal 3:23-29). A close reading of this psalm reveals, however, that it is neither pedantically repetitive nor naively touting legalism. The "law" the psalm speaks of is simply God's instructions in their many forms. The story of salvation is part of that instruction. So in today's reading the psalmist first confesses that God is the only source of goodness and life: "Your hands have made and fashioned me" (v. 73a). The commandments come into play as the psalmist asks for greater understanding of how to respond to God's goodness (v. 73b); therefore, it is possible for us to say, with the psalmist, "your law is my delight" (v. 77b).

PRAYER

How delightful it is, O God, to be obedient to you. In our better moments we recognize that serving you is not binding

or restrictive. Your people Israel learned long ago that they had a choice: serving Pharaoh or serving you. Help us to choose you, the one who supplies all our needs. Truly in your care alone we are able to say, "I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1b). Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2017

The Rev. Derek Davenport '05, Director of Enrollment / Co-director of the Miller Summer Youth Institute, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 34

- 1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- 2 My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.
- 3 O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.
- 4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.
- 5 Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.
- 6 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.
- 7 The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- 8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.
- 9 O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.
- 10 The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.
- 11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
- 12 Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?
- 13 Keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.
- 14 Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it.
- 15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their cry.
- 16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.
- 17 When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears,
and rescues them from all their troubles.
- 18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.
- 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.
- 20 He keeps all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.

- 21 Evil brings death to the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be
condemned.

DEVOTIONAL

Reading this psalm is somewhat shocking because it is so physical. The psalmist writes about mouths, lips, and tongues. We read of eyes, faces, and bones.

This psalm accomplishes two things with such physical words. First, it encourages us to consider how physical and tangible faith can be. Living our faith requires us to use our bodies, not just our minds. The words that come out our mouths are just as important as the thoughts we have in our minds. Second, the physicality of expression in this psalm emphasizes God as immanent. The psalmist says so explicitly—“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted”—and also implicitly with the language of God’s face and eyes and ears.

As we observe Lent, let us consider both of these lessons. Let’s consider how to be faithful with everything that we are, body and mind. Also, let’s spend time simply enjoying a God who chose to be Emmanuel, God with us.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for choosing to be near, even when we feel you are far away. Help us to live out our faith with all that we are. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Leanna Fuller, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 9:13-21

13 Furthermore the LORD said to me, “I have seen that this people is indeed a stubborn people. 14 Let me alone that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and more numerous than they.” 15 So I turned and went down from the mountain, while the mountain was ablaze; the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. 16 Then I saw that you had indeed sinned against the LORD your God, by casting for yourselves an image of a calf; you had been quick to turn from the way that the LORD had commanded you. 17 So I took hold of the two tablets and flung them from my two hands, smashing them before your eyes. 18 Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty

nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin you had committed, provoking the LORD by doing what was evil in his sight. 19 For I was afraid that the anger that the LORD bore against you was so fierce that he would destroy you. But the LORD listened to me that time also. 20 The LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him, but I interceded also on behalf of Aaron at that same time. 21 Then I took the sinful thing you had made, the calf, and burned it with fire and crushed it, grinding it thoroughly, until it was reduced to dust; and I threw the dust of it into the stream that runs down the mountain.

DEVOTIONAL

In our reading for today, Moses comes down from the mountain carrying the two tablets of the covenant, only to discover that the Israelites have built a golden calf and are worshipping it. Perhaps we can understand why the people have done so: they had been wandering in the wilderness for many years and their future probably felt very uncertain. When Moses, their leader, disappeared to go talk with God, their fear and anxiety likely overwhelmed them, and this feeling may be what convinced them to create something tangible in which to place their faith and trust. God becomes angry with the people not because they felt fearful and anxious, but because they dealt with those feelings by making an idol for themselves instead of trusting God’s promises. In this Lenten season of self-examination, we are challenged to look at our own lives and ask ourselves, When I am fearful and anxious, what idols am I tempted to worship? What statues do I need to destroy so that I can again place my faith in God alone?

PRAYER

Merciful God, we thank you that even when you become angry with us for our sinful ways, you do not destroy us or cast us away from your presence. Instead, you continue to love us and welcome us back each time we stray. Help us to recognize those places in our lives where we are trusting in the wrong things, and bring us back into right relationship with you. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2017

The Rev. Anthony Rivera, Director of Admissions, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 9:23-10:5

23 And when the LORD sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, “Go up and occupy the land that I have given you,” you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God, neither trusting him nor obeying him. 24 You have been

rebellious against the LORD as long as he has known you. 25 Throughout the forty days and forty nights that I lay prostrate before the LORD when the LORD intended to destroy you, 26 I prayed to the LORD and said, "Lord GOD, do not destroy the people who are your very own possession, whom you redeemed in your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 27 Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; pay no attention to the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin, 28 otherwise the land from which you have brought us might say, 'Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he has brought them out to let them die in the wilderness.' 29 For they are the people of your very own possession, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm." 10:1 At that time the LORD said to me, "Carve out two tablets of stone like the former ones, and come up to me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood. 2 I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you smashed, and you shall put them in the ark." 3 So I made an ark of acacia wood, cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and went up the mountain with the two tablets in my hand. 4 Then he wrote on the tablets the same words as before, the ten commandments that the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the LORD gave them to me. 5 So I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark that I had made; and there they are, as the LORD commanded me.

DEVOTIONAL

Reflection—a word that best describes today's passage. Moses reminds Israel of the reason their fathers failed to enter the Promised Land.

In God's interaction with the Israelites after leaving Egypt, it is grace that overshadows all God did for them. Guidance, safety, provision, care . . . the Triune God self-revealed to a people who, in turn, complained, rebelled, and simply did not believe in Him—so much so that their unbelief prevented them from entering the land "flowing with milk and honey."

As we observe this season of Lent, let us examine our hearts and ask whether, as with the Israelites, unbelief characterizes how we look and interact with God. Unbelief prevents us from seeing the awesomeness of God at work and keeps us from living a life worthy of His calling. To serve God in a state of unbelief is a contradiction. God is trustworthy!

PRAYER

Gracious God, as we ponder on today's reading, forgive us for those moments in which we did not trust you, did not believe you. Help us to take you at your word in the knowledge that you are faithful and eternally trustworthy. God, we turn our hearts to you today. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Nancy Lowmaster '11, Pastor of Community Presbyterian Church of Geneseo, N.Y. / Board Member, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 105

- 1 O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples.
- 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.
- 3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
- 4 Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually.
- 5 Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,
- 6 O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.
- 7 He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.
- 8 He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,
- 9 the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac,
- 10 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance."
- 12 When they were few in number, of little account, and strangers in it,
- 13 wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people,
- 14 he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account,
- 15 saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm."
- 16 When he summoned famine against the land, and broke every staff of bread,
- 17 he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
- 18 His feet were hurt with fetters, his neck was put in a collar of iron;
- 19 until what he had said came to pass, the word of the LORD kept testing him.
- 20 The king sent and released him; the ruler of the peoples set him free.
- 21 He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions,
- 22 to instruct his officials at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom.
- 23 Then Israel came to Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.

24 And the LORD made his people very fruitful,
and made them stronger than their foes,
25 whose hearts he then turned to hate his people,
to deal craftily with his servants.
26 He sent his servant Moses,
and Aaron whom he had chosen.
27 They performed his signs among them,
and miracles in the land of Ham.
28 He sent darkness, and made the land dark;
they rebelled against his words.
29 He turned their waters into blood,
and caused their fish to die.
30 Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.
31 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.
32 He gave them hail for rain,
and lightning that flashed through their land.
33 He struck their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees of their country.
34 He spoke, and the locusts came,
and young locusts without number;
35 they devoured all the vegetation in their land,
and ate up the fruit of their ground.
36 He struck down all the firstborn in their land,
the first issue of all their strength.
37 Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold,
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.
38 Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon it.
39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.
40 They asked, and he brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.
42 For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.
43 So he brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.
44 He gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,
45 that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.
Praise the LORD!

DEVOTIONAL

I am surrounded by a surprising number of aids to help me remember. Appointment cards magnetted to my refrigerator, lists in my planner, chiming pop-up reminders on my computer, a sticky-note phone widget. Even my microwave will record and play messages to assist me in remembering what I have to remember today.

I need those aids, because I forget (more than I'd like to admit). So did the Israelites. They forgot who provided them

with a land and an identity. They forgot who blessed them with sun and rain and harvest. They forgot who protected them from plagues and enemies. They forgot who claimed them as a people and promised always to be their God. And when they forgot—because of hardship or arrogance or fear or boredom—the Israelites turned away from the God who had given them life and freedom. We are no different now.

Psalm 105 is a call for us today to remember God and to remember all God's blessings . . . because when we remember, we can't help but praise and worship the God who never forgets God's loving and grace-filled covenant with us.

PRAYER

Eternal God, fill me with your Holy Spirit of encouragement and chiding and remembering. In this moment, show me the many ways you have blessed me . . . Let me live my praise and worship of you today and throughout these days of Lent while never forgetting that you gave your love for me enfleshed in Jesus Christ, in whose name I offer myself and this prayer to you. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2017

The Rev. Erin Davenport LSW '05, Director of the Miller Summer Youth Institute, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 11:18-28

18 You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 20 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. 22 If you will diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, 23 then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. 24 Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. 25 No one will be able to stand against you; the LORD your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you. 26 See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if

you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn from the way that I am commanding you today, to follow other gods that you have not known.

DEVOTIONAL

“Loving the Lord your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul”—this is the command from verse 13 that is referenced throughout our passage today. This command is so important that the Israelites are implored to tell it to their children constantly—at home, away from home, when they sleep, when they wake up. There is no hour or situation when this command is not of utmost importance: Love the Lord your God and serve him. This passage is the foundation of my life. It is the reason I do what I do every single day. I encourage you today to let these words rush over you and through you, to tell them passionately to your children and your children’s children and the children you are blessed to be around through everything you do, every word you speak. Let us love the Lord our God and serve him with all our hearts and with all our souls.

PRAYER

Lord, no matter who our children are today—biological, young, old, neighbors, friends—help us to see them as children who need to hear this command today. Give us wisdom to share your love through our actions and words in times of joy and strife. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2017

Dr. Scott Hagley, Assistant Professor of Missiology, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Mark 3:31-4:9

3:31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” 33 And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” 4:1 Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. 2 He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 “Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly,

since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” 9 And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

DEVOTIONAL

There’s always hope
Hope in death
It brands these bonds
Refines the rest
(from “These Days are Numbered” by The Head and the Heart)

Our Gospel text for today narrates the death of a preferred image of Jesus. Mark 3:31 begins in the middle of a cluster of stories held together by Jesus’ return home in 3:19b. After teaching, drawing crowds, and performing miraculous signs, Jesus returns home, and his family, certain that Jesus has gone crazy, attempts to restrain him. At the same time, the Scribes accuse him of demonic dealings. After telling the Scribes that “a house divided against itself cannot stand,” Mark turns the story back to Jesus’ family, where Jesus indirectly addresses their concerns by redefining kinship. Mark narrates an enigma. Jesus refuses to be defined by the images that skeptics (the Scribes) and the faithful (the family) have for him. In his mercy toward us, he is wholly his own. We, therefore, can receive and respond to him, but we cannot construct or contain him. May we hear, see, and receive Jesus in unexpected ways this day.

PRAYER

Psalm 103
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.
The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

MONDAY, MARCH 13, 2017

*Kimberly Gonxhe '07, Director of the Metro-Urban Institute,
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 121

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
- 2 My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 The Lord will not let your foot slip—
the One who watches over you will not slumber;
- 4 indeed, the One who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- 5 The LORD watches over you—
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
- 6 the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
- 7 The LORD will keep you from all harm—
the Lord will watch over your life;
- 8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

DEVOTIONAL

Tragedy. Trauma. Pain. There are so many moments in the vicissitudes of life when we ask, Where is God in this? Why do the righteous suffer? Why do devout Christians die in pain? Why did tragedy strike my family? Why was this disease allowed to attack my body?

This life is full of mountains and valleys, joys and pains, triumphs and disappointments, but the God we serve is bigger than them all. As we trust and surrender ourselves to the Lord, things work out for our good. God uses both the beautiful and horrific to shape us into people we would never have dared to become on our own. Somehow, through this pruning and growing we become agents of influence and change able to influence others around us positively. As we look back, we can truly see that the eyes of God were watching over us all throughout our journey and protecting us along the way.

PRAYER

Lord, you are faithful. May we be still enough to see your hand in our lives. May we be always grateful for your unfailing love. May we trust you to do what you have said.

TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2017

*The Rev. Dr. David Morse, Lecturer in United Methodist
Studies, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary*

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 25

- 1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
- 2 O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
- 3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
- 4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.
- 5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.
- 6 Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast
love,
for they have been from of old.
- 7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my
transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!
- 8 Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
- 9 He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
- 10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and
faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.
- 11 For your name's sake, O LORD,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
- 12 Who are they that fear the LORD?
He will teach them the way that they should choose.
- 13 They will abide in prosperity,
and their children shall possess the land.
- 14 The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
and he makes his covenant known to them.
- 15 My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.
- 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
- 17 Relieve the troubles of my heart,
and bring me out of my distress.
- 18 Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.
- 19 Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
- 20 O guard my life, and deliver me;
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
- 21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.
- 22 Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all its troubles.

DEVOTIONAL

During the time we call Lent, we are given an opportunity to reflect in a unique way on the question, “Who am I before God?” As we lift our souls to God, we are challenged to reflect on that question anew. The psalmist gives us some guidance to answer that question. As we reflect on his words, we discover several aspects of who we are. We are forgiven. Our sins, though real, have been forgiven. We are instructed. The Lord instructs us in the way of wisdom and thereby guides our path. We are given consolation in times of distress. These gifts, among others, are the gifts of God’s presence. This awareness empowers us to be able to live lives of confidence, lives of service, and lives of victory.

PRAYER

God of grace, God of forgiveness, God of wisdom, give us power to lift our souls to you, to embrace the cross, and to follow you as faithful disciples confident of your victory in Christ and our victory in Him. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2017

The Rev. Patrice Fowler-Searcy '13, Associate Pastor for Mission Ministries, East Liberty Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh / Board Member, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 5:1-18

1 After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. 3 In these lay many invalids — blind, lame, and paralyzed. 5 One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” 7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” 8 Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath. 10 So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” 11 But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” 12 They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. 14 Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” 15 The man went away and told the

Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” 18 For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus went up to Jerusalem, the place where he ultimately would be lifted up and crucified, would draw all people unto himself, and would be recognized as the Son of God. Yet in this passage Jesus is near the Sheep Gate at the “House of Mercy” (Beth-zatha), where he finds a man who had been ill for 38 years. And Jesus queries the man, “Do you want to be made well?”

That is the question we each face daily: Do we want to be made well? Do we want to be made whole and cleansed of our sin, iniquities, proclivities, and faithlessness that cause us to be outside the will of God? Much like the Israelites whose faithlessness led them to wander in the desert for 38 years, our faithlessness leads us to dry places—or finds us sitting at the House of Mercy, yet unable to lift up our mats and walk. During this Lenten season, as we contemplate the faithfulness of God and the sacrifice of Christ, may we realize that we are healed, whole, and redeemed by God’s grace, mercy, and love.

PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks that your faithfulness is from everlasting to everlasting. As we contemplate the sacrifice of Christ, may we realize that we are empowered by your mercy to leave behind every weight that might cause us to stumble and to live faithfully as your children. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2017

Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/13, Worship Coordinator, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28

9 On that day, says the LORD, courage shall fail the king and the officials; the priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded. 10 Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD, how utterly you have deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, ‘It shall be well with you,’ even while the sword is at the throat!”

- 19 My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!
 Oh, the walls of my heart!
 My heart is beating wildly;
 I cannot keep silent;
 for I hear the sound of the trumpet,
 the alarm of war.
- 20 Disaster overtakes disaster,
 the whole land is laid waste.
 Suddenly my tents are destroyed,
 my curtains in a moment.
- 21 How long must I see the standard,
 and hear the sound of the trumpet?
- 22 "For my people are foolish,
 they do not know me;
 they are stupid children,
 they have no understanding.
 They are skilled in doing evil,
 but do not know how to do good."
- 23 I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
 and to the heavens, and they had no light.
- 24 I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
 and all the hills moved to and fro.
- 25 I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
 and all the birds of the air had fled.
- 26 I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
 and all its cities were laid in ruins
 before the LORD, before his fierce anger.
- 27 For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a
 desolation;
 yet I will not make a full end.
- 28 Because of this the earth shall mourn,
 and the heavens above grow black;
 for I have spoken, I have purposed;
 I have not relented nor will I turn back.

DEVOTIONAL

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God has been calling His people to repentance, but Judah will not turn. This passage gives us a pretty bleak picture of wrath and destruction. The consequences of sin play out in a startling reversal of the creation narrative as Jeremiah "looks on" at the world's de-creation back to the chaos from which it was called (vv. 23-26).

As we journey to the cross this Lenten season, we are invited to "look on" along with Jeremiah—to look upon our selves and our world; to look upon the painful reality of injustice and broken relationships caused and perpetuated by our own failures to love God and one another fully. In short, to look upon all to which we would rather turn a blind eye. Our hearts will be broken along with God's, and we will cry out with Him in anguish. But it is when we have truly looked at all that separates us from God and one another that we are able to "look on" as it is all put to death—nailed to the cross—that we might be freed to live as new creations in Christ.

PRAYER

Loving God, you have put to death the sin that separates us from you and one another. In you there is a new creation. In that assurance, allow us the grace to see ourselves clearly, that we may turn again to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2017

The Rev. Dr. L. Roger Owens, Associate Professor of Christian Spirituality and Ministry, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 148

- 1 Praise the Lord!
 Praise the Lord from the heavens;
 praise him in the heights!
- 2 Praise him, all his angels;
 praise him, all his host!
- 3 Praise him, sun and moon;
 praise him, all you shining stars!
- 4 Praise him, you highest heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens!
- 5 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
 for he commanded and they were created.
- 6 He established them forever and ever;
 he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.
- 7 Praise the Lord from the earth,
 you sea monsters and all deeps,
 fire and hail, snow and frost,
 stormy wind fulfilling his command!
- 9 Mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars!
- 10 Wild animals and all cattle,
 creeping things and flying birds!
- 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,
 princes and all rulers of the earth!
- 12 Young men and women alike,
 old and young together!
- 13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
 for his name alone is exalted;
 his glory is above earth and heaven.
- 14 He has raised up a horn for his people,
 praise for all his faithful,
 or the people of Israel who are close to him.
 Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

Lent is a season of penitence. We engage in self-examination and seek forgiveness; we remember that we are humans, from "humus"—the earth.

And yet in the midst of Lent, Psalm 148 intrudes as a reminder: We are still a people of praise. We may have buried the “Alleluias,” but we don’t need to forget what God has done. God has created and established all that is—including us. And so the psalm calls all of creation—sea monsters, fruit trees, mountains—to praise, which it can’t not do. By its very existence, creation praises God.

That’s what makes us different from the rest of creation. We can choose to turn away from our ultimate purpose—to worship, glorify, and enjoy God. In Lent we remember our habit of turning away from our true end and what God did in Christ to turn us back.

And so even in Lent, let us dare to let praise slip from our lips. Let’s not leave the mountains and fruit trees to rejoice alone.

PRAYER

Forgiving God, we praise you for the work of creation, but most especially for the work of re-creating us in Christ, for forgiving us our sins and turning us back to the direction of our true purpose and end—to praise you forever. This we pray in the name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Don McKim '74, Academic and Reference Editor, Westminster John Knox Press / Board Member, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 149

- 1 Praise the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.
- 2 Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.
- 3 Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.
- 4 For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.
- 5 Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.
- 6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
7 to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
8 to bind their kings with fetters
and their nobles with chains of iron,
9 to execute on them the judgment decreed.
This is glory for all his faithful ones.
Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

“Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song” (v. 1) commands the Psalm. Praise God for a victory God gave the people. We don’t know what it was. But God “adorns the humble with victory” (v. 4). So sing!

The words “new song” appear in other psalms (33:3; 96:1). They may designate a new composition praising God’s goodness. But Karl Barth suggested that, in the Old Testament, “new song” refers to “the coming and crucial time of the Messiah” (*Church Dogmatics* III/3, 472). If he’s correct, this text is one for Lent.

The “humble” obtained “victory” (in Hebrew, also “salvation”). Jesus the Messiah “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Then God exalted him (2:9). Jesus brought victory and salvation. In Lent, we praise the humble Jesus who saves us from the cross—and who triumphs! God’s people “exult in glory” (v. 5). Sing a new song!

PRAYER

O God of goodness and blessing, we praise you that you are always with us. As you protected and helped your ancient people, so through your presence do you do for us now as we know your salvation in Jesus Christ. Thank you for the humble Christ, who triumphs over all! Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 19, 2017

Dr. Martha Robbins, Joan Marshall Professor Emerita of Pastoral Care, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary / Director, Pneuma Institute

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

12 “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. 13 “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” 17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,

which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

DEVOTIONAL

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. Here Paul is chiding those among the Corinthian community who falsely claim a freedom to enact carnal desires without discerning the effects such actions have on the individual and on the community. Paul thus provides the foundation and a principle for discerning whether something is beneficial or harmful to individuals, the community, and creation. He asks them and us to step back and reflect on the source and purpose of our lives. Why were we created, redeemed, and gifted with the Holy Spirit if it were not for God’s desire for us to be united in love with God, one another, and all creation as living members of Christ’s Body, glorifying God? That’s the foundation! Every desire, thought, word, and action leads us either toward or away from the purpose for which we were created. The principle for discerning our choices, then, is twofold: (1) do I recognize which direction this particular desire, thought, word, or action is leading me or could lead me, and (2) do I choose and act upon that which glorifies God or that which further enslaves me, the community, or creation?

PRAYER

Gracious God, in your loving mercy and for the sake of your glory, help me each day to notice more accurately those desires, thoughts, words, and actions that are leading me toward you and those that are leading me away from you, and grant me the grace to act or reject them accordingly. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2017

The Rev. Melanie Kim Hamill '12, Campus Minister, Ringling College of Art & Design, New College of Florida, and University of South Florida, Sarasota-Manatee

SCRIPTURE

John 7:14-36

14 About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. 15 The Jews were astonished at it, saying, “How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?” 16 Then Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. 17 Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. 18 Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but

the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him. 19 “Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?” 20 The crowd answered, “You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?” 21 Jesus answered them, “I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. 22 Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. 23 If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man’s whole body on the sabbath? 24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” 25 Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? 26 And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? 27 Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.” 28 Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. 29 I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.” 30 Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. 31 Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, “When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?” 32 The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him. 33 Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. 34 You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.” 35 The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? 36 What does he mean by saying, ‘You will search for me and you will not find me’ and, ‘Where I am, you cannot come’?”

DEVOTIONAL

As we know, teaching and healing were intrinsic parts of Jesus’ ministry. He taught right up to the very end. He healed right up to the end. During his last trip to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus deliberately chose to heal a man on the Sabbath. This violation of the Sabbath Law greatly angered the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders, who believed that their interpretation of the law was the only path toward being “right” with God. Jesus set out to remove the pillars of power from the religious leaders of his time. That he was well versed without any formal teaching threatened the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders. Jesus publicly questioned and revealed a fatal flaw in the belief system they had established. They were so bound by their understanding of the Law that they missed the true character of God revealed in the Law. Jesus wanted his captive audience to understand that honoring God by tending to the needs of others will always be the priority of the Kingdom of God over following the rules for rules’ sake.

PRAYER

May we follow Jesus . . .
May we teach like Jesus . . .
May we question those in power like Jesus . . .
May we work to serve like Jesus . . .
May we bring healing like Jesus . . .
May we point to Jesus . . .
May we hope in Jesus . . .
May we do all these things in the mighty name of Jesus
Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Steve Tuell, James A. Kelso Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 7:21-34

21 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. 22 For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. 23 But this command I gave them, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you." 24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. 25 From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; 26 yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did. 27 So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. 28 You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

29 Cut off your hair and throw it away;
raise a lamentation on the bare heights,
for the LORD has rejected and forsaken
the generation that provoked his wrath.

30 For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the LORD; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it. 31 And they go on building the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire—which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. 32 Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury

in Topheth until there is no more room. 33 The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the animals of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. 34 And I will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste.

DEVOTIONAL

Critics of religion often claim that God is nothing more than human arrogance "writ large against the sky." It is sadly true that, rather than pursuing what it means for us to be made in God's image, we often try to remake God into ours! Jeremiah confronts a people persuaded that God is like them: unjust and bloodthirsty. They are sacrificing their own children to this "god" in the Valley of Hinnom—or, as the Gospels call it, Gehenna (Matt 5:22; Mark 9:34). Jeremiah calls his people, and us, back to the true worship of the true God, who requires not blood, but love and justice: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you" (Jer 7:23).

PRAYER

Open our eyes, O Lord, to who you are, and to who we are. Grant us the clarity of vision never to confuse the two. This we pray in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, who alone "is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Heb 1:3). Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2017

Dr. Helen Blier, Director of Continuing Education, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 51

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
- 5 Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

- 6 You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
- 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be
pleased.
- 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings

DEVOTIONAL

David's remorse provides us with a heavy read three weeks into Lent. After being confronted by Nathan, David pleads for God's mercy. His sin? It was more than just adultery and murder. Rather, those acts, horrible in themselves, were the means by which he violated right relationship—with Bathsheba, with Uriah, with himself, and, ultimately, with God. Psalm 51 is his response to Nathan's shattering revelation—"You are the man!" (2 Sam 12:7).

Self-disclosure is no stranger to us these days. #Nofilter, social media, calling-out culture, TSA scrutiny, medical tests—all plumb the depths of human bodies and behavior and dredge stuff up into the light of day for scrutiny, consumption, and judgment. But David's remorse is different. It's not self-disclosure—it's self-examination within the context of a relationship with a God who judges . . . and whose primary attribute is mercy. As Pope Francis has said, "The mercy of our God is infinite and indescribable." Indeed, the plumb line for God's judgment of us is the degree to which we—created in God's image and likeness—show mercy ourselves.

As we engage in our own self-examination this Lenten season, let's remember that we do so in the embrace of a God of mercy who calls us to extend the same to others (and ourselves, too).

PRAYER

God of mercy, we are not so different from David. We too go astray and find ourselves forgetting that you call us to be people of that same mercy—showing welcome to the stranger, compassion to the oppressed, forgiveness to others as imperfect as we are. Awaken in us the kind of self-awareness that brings us deeper into the experience of your infinite and indescribable love so that we can incarnate that love to those who need it most.

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2017

Fr. Eric McIntosh '12, Priest, St. James Episcopal Church, Penn Hills, Pa.

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 10:11-24

- 11 Thus shall you say to them: The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.
- 12 It is he who made the earth by his power,
who established the world by his wisdom,
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.
- 13 When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens,
and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth.
He makes lightnings for the rain,
and he brings out the wind from his storehouses.
- 14 Everyone is stupid and without knowledge;
goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols;
for their images are false,
and there is no breath in them.
- 15 They are worthless, a work of delusion;
at the time of their punishment they shall perish.
- 16 Not like these is the LORD, the portion of Jacob,
for he is the one who formed all things,
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;
the LORD of hosts is his name.
- 17 Gather up your bundle from the ground,
O you who live under siege!
- 18 For thus says the LORD:
I am going to sling out the inhabitants of the land
at this time,
and I will bring distress on them,
so that they shall feel it.
- 19 Woe is me because of my hurt!
My wound is severe.
But I said, "Truly this is my punishment,
and I must bear it."
- 20 My tent is destroyed,
and all my cords are broken;

my children have gone from me,
and they are no more;
there is no one to spread my tent again,
and to set up my curtains.

- 21 For the shepherds are stupid,
and do not inquire of the LORD;
therefore they have not prospered,
and all their flock is scattered.
- 22 Hear, a noise! Listen, it is coming —
a great commotion from the land of the north
to make the cities of Judah a desolation,
lair of jackals.
- 23 I know, O LORD, that the way of human beings is not in
their control,
that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.
- 24 Correct me, O LORD, but in just measure;
not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing.

DEVOTIONAL

I read this passage and all I have are questions for us today. I wonder, Who are today's "goldsmiths" put to shame by their idols? Who are today's "stupid shepherds" who do not "inquire of the LORD" and whose "flocks," therefore, "have not prospered" but instead have "scattered"? What today might be the "great commotion" coming from the "land of the north" to bring desolation on those who have forsaken the God who "made the earth by his power" and "established the world by his wisdom"? I perceive that desolation is an equal-opportunity affliction.

If I ask these questions about the world around me—and I do want to ask them—I then must wonder whether that world might be asking these questions about me! As I look at America, I am awake to the fact that America cannot claim she knows God. Can we who live within her borders claim to know God if we keep silent to that which angers God?

Do I know you God? I do know that I should not fear man, political elections, the new administration, or rising racial tension. But I *should* fear you, Lord! I should fear seeing this prophecy of old be answered on us—and that fear should move me to actions that do not anger but instead *honor* you.

PRAYER

Oh Lord, God of "another chance," have we run out of ours? Are you sending a "great commotion" on us as a nation? Correct us, Lord, "but in just measure, not in your anger." Bring us to full repentance, not "to nothing." We beg you, turn us to you and do not turn away. Lord hear our prayer!

FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Jim Durlesser '78/'80, Lecturer in Biblical Languages, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 130

- 1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.
- 2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!
- 3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
- 4 But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.
- 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
- 6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.
- 7 O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
- 8 It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

DEVOTIONAL

In Christian tradition, Psalm 130 is one of the seven penitential psalms and is known by its first words in the Latin version: *De Profundis*, "Out of the Depths." It is a personal prayer for help, a prayer for redemption, that is prayed from the depths, from the lowest points of life.

In a few weeks, we will observe Good Friday. We will remember the agony of the cross of Calvary and the darkest points of life. But then, for the rest of Friday and all day Saturday, we will wait. We will join the Hebrew poet who wrote Psalm 130 in declaring, "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope."

We wait and we hope in the LORD because we know that out of the darkest depths of Good Friday there will emerge a new dawn on Easter morning, a new dawn of life and renewal.

PRAYER

Lord, we wait for you. During this Lenten season, out of the deepest and darkest depths of life, we hope in you. On Good Friday, as we remember Jesus' suffering and death, we put our hope in you. For we look forward to the life and renewal that you give us on Easter. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Edwin Chr. van Driel, Bicentennial Directors' Associate Professor of Theology, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Romans 6:12-23

12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, 18 and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. 20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DEVOTIONAL

In a culture that admires self-made people who pull themselves up by their bootstraps, Lent's time of introspection can easily become another one of these times in which we try to get ourselves in shape. "Striving for holiness" and "living in obedience" are seductive temptations for those who have "accepted Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior."

Careful reading of Paul suggests that the gift we have received in Christ Jesus goes much deeper than that. "Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life," he says (Rom 6:13). In Christ we, who were dead, have been united with him in his resurrection, we read yesterday. That's way bigger than "choosing for Jesus." To be resurrected from the dead is not something we do ourselves. It needs to be done to us.

And yes, because of this, we live differently. An imperative follows the indicative. But our living differently is exactly a resting in the fact that we no longer have to shape our own lives. That we no longer have to be the masters of our own destiny, but that we have become slaves of the righteous One—of Jesus. That's the gift of Lent.

PRAYER

Lord our God, Thank you for bringing us to life. Will you help us today to live as the ones you already have given us to be. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 2017

Michelle Spomer, Donald G. Miller Librarian and Director of The Clifford E. Barbour Library, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 32

- 1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
- 2 Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- 3 While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.
- 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah
- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah
- 6 Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.
- 7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
- 9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.
- 10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.
- 11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

DEVOTIONAL

"I'm sorry." These are often two of the most difficult words to say to someone. Fear, pride, laziness, apathy—these are just a few of the "reasons" we avoid apologizing and taking responsibility for the mistakes we have made. Asking for forgiveness can be even more difficult, for in doing so we make ourselves even more vulnerable than we did when we first apologized. But what a relief when we've taken both

of these steps! While we might still have to live with the consequences of our mistakes, the acts of apologizing and asking for forgiveness are the most significant steps toward healing and reconciliation that we can take. Lent is a time of self-examination and reflection on one's relationship with God. Why not use this time to take the first steps in repairing a broken relationship—with a friend, a family member, or God. There may be no better way to prepare for Easter.

PRAYER

Lord, you are my hiding place. You preserve me from trouble and surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Thank you for your forgiveness and steadfast love. Give me the strength to mend the broken relationships in my life. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2017

Dr. Tucker Ferda, Lecturer in New Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 6:1-15

1 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2 A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3 Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" 10 Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." 15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

DEVOTIONAL

Just as God provided for Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness, so Jesus miraculously provides food for this crowd. The parallel was not lost on those 5,000 in attendance, as they took Jesus to be "the prophet" whom Moses predicted (Deut 18) and tried to install him as king by force. But Jesus had already resisted the temptations of Satan to seize his kingdom with grandeur and spectacle, and he does the same here. The significance of the miracle, as Jesus will explain later in Capernaum, is far greater than the crowd had thought: Jesus is not just a king, he is the New Manna. He is the bread that comes down from heaven and provides "life" to all. As we wait in the desert of Lent, we put aside what the world offers to sustain us so that we might hunger for the Bread of Life.

PRAYER

Lord, we are tempted to eat what should not be eaten, to make our bread from stones. But we live only by your Word come down from heaven to become flesh. Teach us to feast on that Bread and to receive our very life from it. Let it sustain us in our efforts to embody your kingdom in the world. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Kenneth J. Woo, Assistant Professor of Church History, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 17:19–27

19 Thus said the LORD to me: Go and stand in the People's Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, 20 and say to them: Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. 21 Thus says the LORD: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. 22 And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the sabbath or do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors. 23 Yet they did not listen or incline their ear; they stiffened their necks and would not hear or receive instruction. 24 But if you listen to me, says the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but keep the sabbath day holy and do no work on it, 25 then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall be inhabited forever. 26 And people shall come from the towns of Judah and the

places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. 27 But if you do not listen to me, to keep the sabbath day holy, and to carry in no burden through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates; it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.

DEVOTIONAL

Sabbath keeping is a tricky topic. For some, it conjures up images of, dare we say, puritanical types fixated on the “don’ts.” For others, sabbath equals self-care, “me time” for whatever is most gratifying. For many more, sabbath keeping never crosses their minds—it’s an ancient ceremony irrelevant for Christians today, especially the really busy ones. This is too bad.

In Jeremiah’s day God was serious about sabbath. Even Jesus’ corrective regarding keeping the Sabbath did not retract a gift he linked to his reign (Mark 2). Indeed, the gift is his reign: God is God, so we don’t need to be. That is the real burden Judah needed to leave at the gates. It is why God invites us to reorder our time—that our worship, rest, and compassion might point beyond “me” to the one upon whom everything depends. Our exertions are not that important. Thanks be to God!

PRAYER

Lord of the Sabbath, in our ever-busy lives show us the limits of our constant striving to remake, redeem, and renew ourselves. Teach us during this Lenten season to repent even of our self-denial if this ever becomes a substitute for trusting you with our past, present, and future. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2017

The Rev. Sue Blank '15, Director of Pastoral Care, Presbyterian SeniorCare, Oakmont, Pa.

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 18:1-11

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 “Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” 3 So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4 The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 6 Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in

my hand, O house of Israel. 7 At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, 8 but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. 9 And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, 10 but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. 11 Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

DEVOTIONAL

I am a quilter. I love the creative process—working with color and line to craft something expressive and unique. The result is usually gratifying. But sometimes, oh sometimes, there is disappointment. Part-way through the process I end up with something quilters call UFOs or PIGS—Unfinished Objects or Projects in Grocery Sacks. These are the creations that just do not work: the colors do not blend, the seams are misaligned, the borders are wonky. So I stuff these creations into plastic bags and tuck them away out of sight. Once the fabric has been cut into pieces and then sewn together, salvaging these “mistakes” is often impossible. Fortunately, salvaging our mistakes is never impossible with God.

In Jeremiah’s oracle, the prophet observes the potter crafting a vessel at his wheel. When that vessel disappointed the craftsman, “he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.” God’s creative process did not end at the seventh day. God continues to create and re-create, bringing hope and new possibilities for us, and for this world.

PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, help us to amend our ways, which disappoint. Open our hearts to new possibilities as you form, reform, and transform us according to your good purposes. Our hope is in you. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2017

The Rev. Michael Gehrling '08, Pastor, Upper Room Church Community, Pittsburgh / Director of International Graduate and Faculty Ministry, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 22:13-23

13 Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice;

- who makes his neighbors work for nothing,
and does not give them their wages;
- 14 who says, "I will build myself a spacious house
with large upper rooms,"
and who cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion.
- 15 Are you a king
because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
- 16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
says the LORD.
- 17 But your eyes and heart
are only on your dishonest gain,
for shedding innocent blood,
and for practicing oppression and violence.
- 18 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning King Jehoiakim
son of Josiah of Judah:
They shall not lament for him, saying,
"Alas, my brother!" or "Alas, sister!"
They shall not lament for him, saying,
"Alas, lord!" or "Alas, his majesty!"
- 19 With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried —
dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of
Jerusalem.
- 20 Go up to Lebanon, and cry out,
and lift up your voice in Bashan;
cry out from Abarim,
for all your lovers are crushed.
- 21 I spoke to you in your prosperity,
but you said, "I will not listen."
This has been your way from your youth,
for you have not obeyed my voice.
- 22 The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds,
and your lovers shall go into captivity;
then you will be ashamed and dismayed
because of all your wickedness.
- 23 O inhabitant of Lebanon,
nested among the cedars,
how you will groan when pangs come upon you,
pain as of a woman in labor!

DEVOTIONAL

Jeremiah offers a stinging critique of King Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was doing what we would expect kings to do: build a beautiful castle— "a spacious house with large upper rooms." But Jeremiah points out the reality that Jehoiakim preferred to ignore or cold-heartedly disregarded: Jehoiakim was building his house on injustice. He was not paying his workers, and he was ignoring the cause of the poor. None of us are kings, but it's still easy for us to live like Jehoiakim. We can purchase clothes off of a clearance rack or

bite into a chocolate bar without thinking about those who may or may not have been paid fairly for making our "stuff."

Jeremiah reminds Jehoiakim, and us, that there is another way—the way of Josiah, Jehoiakim's father. Josiah did "justice and righteousness He judged the cause of the poor and needy." This, the Lord says, is what it means to know God. Indeed, this is what it means to know Jesus, who began his most famous sermon by announcing, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

The prophet Jeremiah presents us with two ways of life: the way of Jehoiakim, and the way of Josiah. The way of dishonest gain, and the way of justice. Which will we choose?

PRAYER

God of justice, your Son, Jesus Christ, blessed the poor. May they experience Christ's blessing through our actions. In Christ we pray. Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017

Ellen Little, Library Circulation Supervisor, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:28-39

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. 31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DEVOTIONAL

"Life is good." You've seen the t-shirts, haven't you? The shirts with the wearer's favorite activity performed by a cartoonish figure? The idea is to spread optimism. I always suspect people who wear those shirts of being naïve, however. I mean, have they watched the news? Wars, famines, genocides, kidnapping of young girls in Nigeria, another hurricane with flooding in Haiti, a shooting down the street, a suicide in the family, cancer. The list goes on and on. We aren't left alone with this list, however. We are given this passage from Romans where we are told that nothing can come between God and those who love him. What could be more important or more glorious than that!? Yes, the world brings tribulation. Jesus said it would do so, but he gives us himself, his love, his gift of grace and ultimately eternal life! Nothing—did you hear that?!?!—nothing can separate us from the God who loved us in action, to the point of sending Jesus to die on a cross to take away our sin. Soon it will be Good Friday, the darkest day of the Christian calendar, but praise God, Good Friday was only the beginning. Easter is coming, and we are God's beloved!!!

PRAYER

Dear God, sometimes life feels overwhelming. Help us to cling to you in these times and to remember that we are your beloved. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

Deborah Burgess '06, Freelance Editor and English as a Second Language Teacher, Pittsburgh

SCRIPTURE

John 6:60-71

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" 61 But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. 65 And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." 66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. 67 So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." 70

Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil." 71 He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.

DEVOTIONAL

"Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." We live in world where there are so many claims that a thing, a place, or a practice will bring us happiness, a sense of worth or fullness of life. They constantly vie for our attention and allegiance so that we can often find ourselves distracted, confused, lost. Peter's question is our question. Where else can we go? It reminds us that there is only One whose promises are sufficient. In these days of Lent, we are encouraged by Peter's question to turn again to Christ—to reject any other claims to sufficiency or redemption, confess our sins, lay our burdens at the Lord's feet, receive his mercy and hear again the words, "I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

PRAYER

Merciful Lord, you know how prone your creatures are to distraction, to putting our trust in lesser things, to relying on the flesh instead of the Spirit. Call us to yourself and teach us, again, that you are the only One with the words of eternal life. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2017

The Rev. Kathy Dain '11, Executive Director, Beth-El Farmworker Ministry Inc., Tampa/St. Petersburg, Fla.

SCRIPTURE

Mark 8:31-9:1

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those

who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." 9:1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

DEVOTIONAL

"You old Devil, you!" That was an expression popular with my father's generation, usually spoken man to man in what we today might call the "old boys club." "You old Devil"—an off-handed compliment to someone who has acquired something usually by nefarious means, but certainly an expression never intended to express evil—just a benign phrase one might say jokingly. However, in Jesus' day, and to the ears of Peter, it was a serious slap in the face—an affront to the senses! "You old Devil!" says Jesus—"Get behind me Satan!"

I am writing this Lenten devotional in the season of autumn, as Indian summer turns the landscape to vibrant hues of red and orange and the first hint of frost assaults our senses. It is a precursor to the long months of winter ahead, with the promise of renewal that comes each spring still a distant hope.

And as I write, questions loom as to whether peace, even civility, can be found amid the rancor in so many sectors of our society and world. "You old Devil, you," no longer seems the benign jest it used to be. Instead, it is a reminder of the evil that persists in each one of us. "Get behind me," Jesus commands. Get behind the only truth that leads to the hope of salvation. During this Lenten season, who will we stand behind?

PRAYER

Holy God, as we remember once more the way of the cross, may we empty our hearts of the enmity that divides and through the power of the Holy Spirit fall in step behind the only one who leads to salvation. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Jim Davison '69, Retired Director, Continuing Education, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 9:1-17

1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither

this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10 But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

DEVOTIONAL

Night, Sight, Light, and . . . Blindness.

When the disciples walk by a blind man, they ask Jesus the age-old question: "Who sinned here?" We understand that question, don't we? When something unfortunate comes our way, aren't we sometimes tempted to wonder what we did wrong? Or perhaps it's the other way around: "I'm sorry I did (or thought, or said) that, Lord. Please don't let anything bad happen!"

Luckily, Jesus denies the link between suffering and sin. He changes the perspective by proclaiming that God will use this tragic situation to reveal Jesus as "the Light of the world." This man lives in darkness, but Jesus enables him to see light. As the story progresses, he seems to recognize the Light as well.

The authorities also see the results of Jesus' action, but they can't accept the obvious conclusion. In spite of possessing healthy eyesight, they are blind to the truth about Jesus' identity. Or, we might say, they see what they want to see. That is a lesson for me, too. How often do preconceived opinions, views of others or myself, hopes, or fears cloud my sight to something I should recognize? Make me blind to something that is true?

This Lent, whom do I resemble—the blind man whose vision was restored, or the authorities who, denying their blindness, lived in darkness?

PRAYER

God of Light, thank you for sending your Son to bring light into the world. Let that light illuminate my heart, so that any blindness in me may be taken away. Let that light enflame my spirit, that I may honor you, follow your Son, and serve this world, so often caught in darkness and despair. In Christ I pray. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 2017

Minh Towner '13, Chaplain, Novant Health Prince William Hospital, Va.

SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 25:8-17

8 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, 9 I am going to send for all the tribes of the north, says the LORD, even for King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these nations around; I will utterly destroy them, and make them an object of horror and of hissing, and an everlasting disgrace. 10 And I will banish from them the sound of mirth and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. 13 I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. 14 For many nations and great kings shall make slaves of them also; and I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands. 15 For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. 16 They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them. 17 So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it.

DEVOTIONAL

I spend a lot of time on the road visiting people and churches, so getting from point A to point B is the ultimate goal of my trip. GPS is my companion, my best friend forever (BFF). But after driving the same route over the years, my

self-confidence improved, and I started taking shortcuts and ignoring my GPS. I kept hearing "Recalculating, recalculating" each time I took a different turn from what my GPS thought was correct. So I had a solution: I didn't tune it out, I just turned it off. But one day I found myself really, really lost in the middle of nowhere—certainly not where I wanted to be and nowhere that I recognized. Fear slowly took over my body and, as fast as I could, I reached for my GPS. My hands were shaking; my heart was racing. At that moment, I realized the consequence of my "disobedience" in not following the instructions of my GPS. I also realized my disobedience to God by my excessive self-reliance and by not listening to God's voice, God's "GPS" instructions.

We are just like the people of Judah in today's reading. They were disobedient to the point that God's wrath was inevitable. Verse 12, however, states that God's wrath would not last forever. The Cross and the death of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, demonstrates His deepest love for us and His desire to be in relationship with us.

So where are you now? Are you lost? Is your GPS turned on, or off? God wants us be in communication with Him, to find our way home to Him. Are we willing?

PRAYER

Oh God, you are a God of mercy and love even when we are so disobedient to you; even in the depth of your anger, you still love us. Your love is beyond measure. We ask you for forgiveness. Help us to have the ears to hear you, a heart to love you, and a zeal and joy to follow your will and not ours. Renew our minds so we can see and hear through the eyes of Jesus, not our own. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2017

The Rev. Jon Draskovic '12, Pastor, Whidbey Presbyterian Church, Oak Harbor, Wa.

SCRIPTURE

John 10:1-18

1 "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. 7 So again Jesus said to them, "Very

truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away — and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

DEVOTIONAL

Confession: I know nothing about shepherding. In his novel *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, Ivan Doig writes about two Scottish immigrants who homesteaded the front range of the Montana Rockies in the 1890s as sheep ranchers. As it turns out, sheep are not smart. Doig writes, "fleecies are a garden that wanders around looking for its own extinction . . . right now they are out there searching for ways to die, and there are many sources willing to oblige their mortal urge."

This less romantic but maybe more accurate understanding of shepherding puts this passage in a new light for me. Being a shepherd of people is a difficult business to be in: We sheep need great care in order not to get lost, much tending in order not to be snatched by wolves and scattered, much prodding in order to see the gate to safety. Thank God that He is the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep.

PRAYER

Thank you, Father for Jesus, our Good Shepherd, the One who shows us the gate and leads us through it; who tends us and keeps us from getting lost; who lays down his life on our behalf when the wolves come to snatch us. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 2017

The Rev. Kelsy Brown '10, Associate Pastor for Mission and Membership, Pinnacle Presbyterian Church, Scottsdale, Ariz.

SCRIPTURE

John 10:19-42

19 Again the Jews were divided because of these words. 20 Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is out of his mind. Why listen to him?" 21 Others were saying, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" 22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; 26 but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. 30 The Father and I are one." 31 The Jews took up stones again to stone him. 32 Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" 33 The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." 34 Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?" 35 If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods' — and the scripture cannot be annulled — 36 can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? 37 If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. 38 But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." 39 Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. 40 He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. 41 Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true." 42 And many believed in him there.

DEVOTIONAL

Have you ever thought about the number of voices that call for our attention? Work, school, projects, children, parents, parishioners, social media, news cycles, and friends continue to share their opinions, needs, time, and requirements of us. Some voices are positive—they congratulate us on a job well done, comfort us during seasons of challenge, and lead us through the darkest valleys. Others are difficult, demanding, and overpowering in our day-to-day lives. It isn't unusual for different voices to call for our attention at the same time but in different directions.

Isn't it amazing that, in the midst of all the voices that call on us, Jesus continues to call us by name? Whenever we take time to listen, we can always hear Jesus' voice rising above the noise of the many voices calling for our attention. Can you hear Jesus' voice? What is He saying to you?

PRAYER

Jesus, in the midst of all the buzz of voices calling for our attention, help us to hear your voice above all the rest. Quiet our minds, take away the distractions, and guide us toward the voice that knows us better than any other—Your voice, which calls each one of us Beloved and invites us to follow. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2017

Karyn Bigelow '16, Government Relations Assistant, Bread for the World, Washington, D.C. / Board Member, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 11:1-27

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10 But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." 11 After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." 13 Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." 17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus

was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

DEVOTIONAL

Throughout the Gospels we see multiple occasions on which there is a problem that seems to have great urgency according to those who believe in Jesus. They need healing for themselves or someone else. They are frightened by the troubled waters. But Jesus does not share that same sense of urgency—in any of the stories. And in this story he is no different. In desperation because of Lazarus' illness, Mary and Martha send for Jesus. When he finally arrives, they focus on his neglecting to come "in time." They focus on actions, timing, and outcomes, but not in that moment on who Jesus is. Jesus moves the conversation from what he "neglected" to do to who he is—the Christ, the Son of God.

Every year in the church, we feel chaos and urgency in planning Palm Sunday, Ash Wednesday, plays, Good Friday, egg hunts, and Easter programs. This passage serves as a reminder that in this Lenten season, as we look to the resurrection and the many things that "need" to be done, we should not lose our focus on Jesus the Christ, the Resurrected One.

PRAYER

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, help us in this season as we do the work of the Kingdom. May we always remember the One whom we serve, the One whom this season is all about. Empower our work to point to Christ, the One who was resurrected to free us from all our sins.

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Kang Na, Associate Professor of Religion, Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pa. / Board Member, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

SCRIPTURE

John 11:28-44

28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and

is calling for you.” 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.” 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

DEVOTIONAL

Walking through the dark days of Lent can be difficult even for the most pious among us because we forget, for much of the time on most days, that we are in Lent. Furthermore, Easter, the light at the end of the tunnel, can rob Lent of its human reality by injecting a subtle dose of Docetism, the doctrine that Christ was only divine, not really human, and therefore did not really suffer.

Oddly, wonderfully, it is John’s very divine portrait of Jesus that shows us his true humanity: Jesus was very upset about Lazarus’ death; he wept . . . while assuring Martha of resurrection hope (vv. 23–27).

On this eve of Passion Sunday and Passion Week, which brings us to the crucifixion-death of Jesus, we remember that much of life is like Lent. On this side of the empty tomb, there is suffering—which is what “passion” means—and lots of it. Even if shy of Job’s devastation, our lives are punctuated by pain and prayers of desperation. And as Ecclesiastes reminds us, echoing Genesis 3:19, we will all die.

The amazing mystery of Jesus’ humanity reminds us of our very own humanity that is all too tempted to leap to Easter joy. But we cannot afford to be docetic, especially during

Lent, especially during Holy Week, especially on Good Friday. By meditating on Jesus’ sorrow at Lazarus’ death, we can properly contemplate the divine mystery of Jesus’ own suffering and death. And only through meditating on his passion can we glimpse the profound mystery of Easter joy . . . of which we shall not yet speak.

PRAYER

O God of mystery, root us in your immeasurable love as we continue our walk through Lent that we may truly embrace Jesus’ humanity and thereby also ours. Keep us faithful and hopeful in the love and humanity of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2017

The Rev. Sarah Sedgwick ’10, Pastor, First United Presbyterian Church of DuBois, Pa.

SCRIPTURE

Zechariah 9:9-12

- 9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- 10 He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- 11 As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant
with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
- 12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

DEVOTIONAL

Anticipating the future fulfilment of these promises, the prophet Zechariah also declared, “And I [the LORD] will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. . . . On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zech12:10; 13:1).

Recognizing the present fulfilling of these promises through Christ, the apostle Matthew wrote: "Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers.' The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. . . . the children [were] crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David.' [And Jesus] left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there" (Matt 21:12-17). The most difficult work of fulfilling God's promises lay just ahead.

PRAYER

Lord God, please help us to honor Jesus' unfathomably difficult yet unwaveringly faithful fulfilling of your gracious and merciful promises to your people by heeding your exhortation that we "Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which [we] were called and for which [we've] made the good confession." By your Spirit, help us to "keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which [you] will bring about at the right time—[you] who [are] the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords," who "alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light . . . —to [you] be honor and eternal dominion" (from 1 Tim 6:12-16). Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 10 2017

The Rev. Mouris Yousef '07, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Blackwood, N.J.

SCRIPTURE

John 12:9-19

9 When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus. 12 The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord — the King of Israel!"

14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

15 "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!"

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that

these things had been written of him and had been done to him. 17 So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. 18 It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. 19 The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!"

DEVOTIONAL

Among the many great things we encounter in John 12:9-19, one of the most important ones deserves our attention: the reaction of the crowd that had come to celebrate the Passover on hearing that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. What we see here is simply a bunch of followers who got amazingly excited about their leader. Of course, we know the crowd had different expectations of the Messiah, the Savior of Israel, from what Jesus' true mission was. But the point remains: the people enthusiastically celebrated Jesus' coming into Jerusalem, David's City, in a very special way. They received Jesus as a conquering king. They spoke of his greatness and his miraculous power.

I keep thinking about our commitment to Jesus and our excitement about his message—are we excited about Jesus, too? If we're not, what is wrong with us as believers in the United States? Have we become so comfortable? Have we lost sight of the greatness of Jesus? Have we forgotten our own mission field?

In this season of Lent, may we acknowledge our need to remember our first love. May we get excited once more about our mission—and about Jesus himself!

PRAYER

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your steadfast love. Be with us as we renew our commitment to Jesus. Help us to get excited about his visitations as the crowd did when he came to Jerusalem. Amen!

TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2017

The Rev. Jim Walker '03, Pastor, First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh

SCRIPTURE

John 12:20-16

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, "The

hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.”

DEVOTIONAL

“. . . unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed”

I’ve come to understand resurrection as more than just a theological concept or doctrine. Resurrection, for me, has become a daily reality, like breathing or eating or sleeping. We have these basic human needs: oxygen and water and food and sleep. Love and belonging and meaning and knowing. These are the things that we need to survive. Without them—we’re dead. We don’t exist. But I’ve learned to include another real gift in this list of basic human necessities: resurrection. It is a sometimes overlooked or misunderstood deep need we all long for. We all live within the rhythm of birthing and dying, dying and birthing. Our minds, bodies, and souls yearn for resurrection, like we crave water, food, and air.

The conflict, of course, is that death is not very appealing. We make every effort to avoid it. But the Spirit will not allow us to live in a made-up, artificial, death-free utopia. God knows what our real needs are and breathes into each of us the saving gift of death and life. God shakes the seeds from the tight grip of our fists. With gritted teeth and watery eyes, we sometimes reluctantly acquiesce—a great set-up for the punch line that is to come: Death is not the end. Death is the exhale that makes way for the inhale. The seed falls to the ground and becomes life, even more rich and abundant. Thus Jesus in John 12, who has just entered the city and is headed to his own death, charges us to see reality through the eyes of God, from the perspective of eternity, and surrender its natural rhythm.

My guess is that many of us are holding tight to some seeds today. Consider this word an invitation to let the seeds go, let them die, and join in the rhythm of eternity. Be nourished by the basic human necessity of resurrection.

In the name of The Resurrection, amen.

PRAYER

Come, Resurrection, and take my seeds. Awaken me to your work around me even at this very moment. As deep calls to deep, may my spirit be immersed in the love that is and causes me to become—the love that takes my death and turns me into life. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2017

The Rev. Alyssa Bell '11, Associate Co-pastor, Shadle Park and Community Presbyterian Churches, Spokane, Wa.

SCRIPTURE

John 12:27-36

27 “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” 30 Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. 34 The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” 35 Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

DEVOTIONAL

Light and darkness. Illumination and shadows. Clarity and confusion. Our world sends us mixed messages about what is light and what is darkness. Our sin clouds our judgement and we believe that a shadow disguised as a lamp can somehow show us the way, any way . . . to peace. Jesus Christ took on all darkness so that we could know light and be surrounded by it always. The Light of the World surrendered to hurt and bitterness, evil and destruction. On His way to the cross, Jesus told his disciples to remain with Him so that they would know the way. In the beginning of John’s Gospel we are reminded that darkness cannot overcome the light. No matter what happens—even death on the cross, even descent into hell—the Light will always crowd out the shadows of sin and evil.

In this Lenten season, we are intensely aware of the encroaching darkness in our world. How easily we start to feel defeated. As we wait for our Savior and as we long for wholeness and peace, let us seek the Light of the World and let us be lights to those around us by proclaiming His hope, peace, love, and joy for all to hear.

PRAYER

Lord, please shine your light upon us today, and with your light strengthen us to be people of light, to shed fear of the

darkness, and to stand with confidence upon your promises. We need your comfort and your assurance. Guide us in the way we ought to go, and light our path. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2017

The Rev. John Magnuson '13, Associate Pastor for Youth and Families, Shadyside Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh

SCRIPTURE

John 17:1-11

1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. 6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. 20 "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be

one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

DEVOTIONAL

Through this journey of Lent we slow our pace to a crawl during Holy Week. We pause each day to remember the last moments of Jesus' earthly life before his crucifixion. On this Maundy Thursday, we find ourselves with the disciples resting at the feet of Jesus as he offers this prayer.

With Jesus' prayer washing over us, we wish for his words to linger just a little while longer, so that we may bask in his love and care for us. We hold on to these words, for we know that the words to come next are those of betrayal. Together, Jesus' prayer and his subsequent betrayal act for us as a mirror in which we see, simultaneously, both God's desire for us and our own disobedient brokenness.

As we pause to sit with Jesus' prayer, may we also sit with him on the night of his betrayal. Resting in this tension, may we sit still enough to see through the cracks of our lives as his grace shines through to fulfil the hope of his prayer.

PRAYER

Ever faithful God, we give you thanks that on the night of your betrayal you were not concerned for yourself but prayed for us, and for all your disciples, that we may be one. By your Spirit unite us through your grace, peace, and love. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 2017

The Rev. Steve Franklin '09, Pastor, Meridian United Presbyterian Church, Butler, Pa.

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 1:10-20

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, 11 inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not

themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look! 13 Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. 14 Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. 15 Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 17 If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. 18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. 20 He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.

DEVOTIONAL

I was once told that Lent was a solemn season of repentance. However, I find the season of Lent to be filled with beauty and hope. While it may, indeed, be a season of repentance and fasting, it points us to and prepares us for the resurrection. It affords us the opportunity to look to Christ knowing that we have already received his grace and that we will continue to do so.

Hope is an expectation or desire that something will happen. Peter writes, “Set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.” Have we set our hope on something other than the grace that Jesus brings us? Lent is a time to look forward to what God will do in the resurrection, a time for us to experience grace. In the knowledge that Jesus claims victory over death, let us set all our hope on God’s grace.

PRAYER

God of the resurrection, may we always set our eyes on the hope you give us in Christ. As we repent in this season of Lent, may we also experience the grace that comes to us through our Savior. May we know what it means to live as people of the resurrection and offer grace to others. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017

Taylor Barner '16, Associate Pastor of Student and Family Ministries, First Presbyterian Church of Burlington, N.C.

SCRIPTURE

Job 19:21-27a

- 21 Have pity on me, have pity on me,
O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
- 22 Why do you, like God, pursue me,
never satisfied with my flesh?
- 23 “O that my words were written down!
O that they were inscribed in a book!
- 24 O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock for ever!
- 25 For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
- 26 and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
27 whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”

DEVOTIONAL

Anyone who has ever skinned a knee or elbow from a fall or playing sports will tell you it is not a pleasant experience. The raw, burning feeling on your skin comes alive with the slightest movement. And even though you know it isn’t a serious injury, the pain reminds you just how frail we human beings are. But as with most injuries, the body begins to heal quickly, and within days the injury is merely a memory.

Today’s passage from Job reminds us that our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is alive and will stand upon the earth once more at the last. But Job also says that when his flesh is totally destroyed, when all is stripped away, perhaps even when his life on earth is over, then he shall see God in the flesh, as his frail, completely exposed self.

C. S. Lewis takes this concept a step further in *The Chronicles of Narnia: Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. SPOILER ALERT. In the novel, the Pevensies’ cousin Eustace is transformed into a dragon because of his brutish nature, and he can only return to being a boy by stripping the dragon skin off his body. But no matter how much he scrapes and tears, he cannot “undragon” himself. Only with the help of Aslan can his dragon-self be permanently stripped away.

Similarly, only when we are stripped of our skin, stripped of our sinfulness, our burdens, and ourselves can we truly see God. When there is nothing left but our flesh, when our walls are taken down, when we become vulnerable—that is when we can truly see and welcome God. And the beautiful truth is that our God is with us.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we know that you are alive, and we rejoice in your resurrection. Strip away our fears, our worries, and ourselves,

O God, so that we may see you. Grant us perseverance and patience as we await the return of your Son. Help us to be vulnerable, to love others as we love ourselves, and to trust in You alone. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2017

The Rev. Dave Dack '11, Pastor, Lemoore Presbyterian Church, Lemoore, Ca.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 24:13-35

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their

companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

DEVOTIONAL

In his first exhortation, Pope Francis wrote, "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter." Surely that is how the two disciples on the road to Emmaus felt. Stuck in grief and disappointment, they couldn't believe the women's Easter news that Jesus had risen, so they pressed on toward a little town whose only noteworthy characteristic was how far away it would get them from Jerusalem.

But then they were ambushed by Jesus, and the result was joy like a consuming fire in their hearts. "Did not our hearts burn within us?" What exquisite joy awaits those who encounter the risen Savior! "Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads."

And notice where the encounter happens: on the road. The joy of Easter is not waiting for you to get to Emmaus. You won't find it in another town, another relationship, another degree, another car, another life. This joy is looking for you, impatiently, here and now, transforming whatever road you're on into a journey with Jesus that takes you "further up and further in" to heaven and so making every step an arrival. "So the ransomed of the Lord shall return." Amen!

PRAYER

Risen Jesus, restore to us the joy of your salvation. Meet us here, meet us now, and make our cup overflow with gratitude and rejoicing. Christ be in every eye that sees me, Christ be in every ear that hears me. Lord Jesus, increase in us, we pray. Amen.

The scripture quotations contained in the lectionary readings are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

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