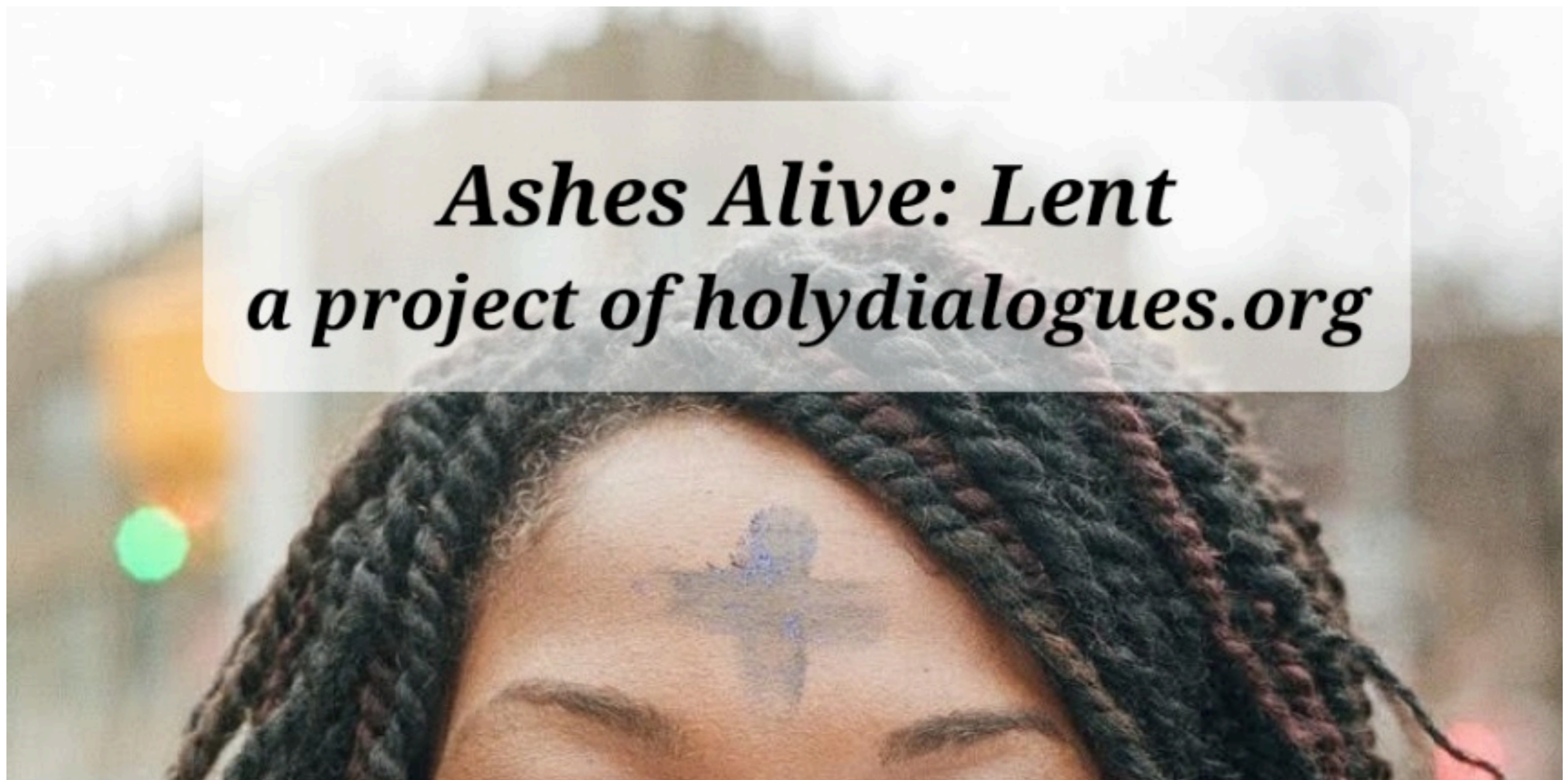


Ashes Alive: Lent A Project of Holy Dialogues

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Lenten devotionals written by LGBTQI+ Christians and their friends.

Ashes Alive: Lent

Lenten Devotionals by
LGBTQI+ Christians
& their friends.

Ashes Alive: Lent is based on the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

With contributions by:

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Developed by Holy Dialogues: A Blessed by Difference Project

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Introduction to Ashes Alive: Lent by Rev. Marian Edmonds-Allen

Welcome! We are so glad that you are here with us!

Ashes Alive: Lent is the second in an ongoing devotional series written by LGBTQI+ Christians and their friends from all over the world, from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions, expressions and points of view.

To preserve as best as possible the unique voices of our contributors their entries are very lightly edited and only for clarity when needed. Our goal is to have multiple writers for each day - we are getting there! For some of the days in Ashes Alive: Lent there are two authors but not every day. If you - are someone you know - would like to be a writer for future devotionals, please email me: marian@parity.nyc

For many people, devotionals are something they have used before, perhaps for years. For others, this is entirely new concept. What our devotional series intends to do is to share the Scripture passages of the day - currently what is known as Year C in the Revised Common Lectionary. Many Christian faiths and denominations use the Revised Common Lectionary to guide their church services, and many individuals use the Revised Common Lectionary to guide their personal Scripture reading.

Personal Scripture reading can be accompanied by written commentary - a devotional volume, like this one. Devotional compilations are often written by one person or written with a particular theme or perspective.

Our theme is love. We believe that all people are made in the image of God, and dearly loved by God. Each and every person has wisdom to share about God and about Scripture. This project seeks to share and amplify voices that often aren't heard together, and each represents the infinite diversity of God.

People from different religious traditions talk about and observe Lent in a variety of ways. Most everyone agrees that Lent is the 40 days that begin on Ash Wednesday and end on the evening of Holy Thursday - the Thursday before Easter. Our authors will journey with you through Easter Day. Some are scholars, others are new to Christianity - all have wisdom and gifts that will give you new ways to think about Scripture and about God.

May you be as blessed as we have been as we have worked together to create this for you!

**How to use Ashes Alive: Lent
by Rev. Kim Purl**

Ashes Alive: Lent devotionals are written by LGBTQI+ Christians and their friends. Contributors write from a wide array of Christian conviction and belief at the intersection of faith and LGBTQI+.

Each has freedom to write from their own beliefs and doctrines without harm to another because we believe there is room for all at the feet of Jesus.

This is the heart of holy dialogue.

Suggestions for how to use the devotional guide are up to you.

Find a time and space to begin with prayer, receive the message of the day's devotional, and prayerfully reflect and dialogue with others on our Facebook group: Ashes Alive.

Find and join the Holy Dialogues Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/holydialogues>) and dialogue with us together during Lent.

We look forward to meeting you!

Ashes Alive: Lenten Devotionals
by LGBTQI+ Christians and their friends
Developed by Holy Dialogues: A Blessed by Difference Project
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**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17, Isaiah 58:1-12, Psalm 51:1-17,
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

As of late, I have been thinking about the word 'performance.' I immediately have a negative association with this word, and words like performativity, facade, and costume. It is for this reason that I sometimes wear my cross under my shirt, the cold metal a chastise against my collarbone.

Perhaps my discomfort comes from the social media age. At every turn, I see videos of good deeds, and wonder what occurred when the camera wasn't rolling. I see posts that fall on my ears like the braying of a donkey, bucking and kicking in the street until someone attends to it.

I do not enjoy the part of me that passes judgement on these people. I do not like the embarrassment that creeps up and down my spine in public: am I performing my kindness? Am I performing my faith? Have I received my reward in full?

Ash Wednesday is my reminder. It reminds us of the original sin, and our vow of repentance - as God said to Adam and Eve, 'dust you are and to dust you shall return.'

When the mark of the cross is placed on my brow or the ash is sprinkled atop my head, I am not thinking about the stares of my classmates. I am thinking of my mortality, and my gratitude for the opportunity to repent.

It bears witness to my sorrow and my faith. Of course, it is not obligatory to wear this in public - some wipe them off after service. Some wear them as a sign of faith and community to others, and some as an act of religious freedom.

I mention the idea of performance today because I associate Ash Wednesday with the sign of the smudged cross. Some practices do not include this mark, and some express discomfort with 'disfig[uring] their faces' as this passage describes. And I cannot say there isn't a public aspect to my penitence today - there are moments of inevitable awkwardness.

I look to the Bible, as I do with most anxieties - ash is synonymous with mourning and penitence, liturgically. It is usually associated with the practice of donning sackcloth, fasting, and covering oneself in ashes. A reader witnesses this after the assault of Tamar, in the Book of Job, in the words of prophets like Jeremiah and Daniel, and by the Maccabees in moments before battle. I cannot measure my discomfort against moments like these, nor the insistent rubbing of the sackcloth.

I can, however, measure it against my reminders. I can trace the shape on my brow as the shape against my collarbone. I can feel the ash like the Earth I will return to. I can pray and promise, and observe my responsibilities as a Christian: humility, penitence, and promise. And when I open my eyes and join in the songs, I rejoice in what I have been given: community, eternal love, and forgiveness.

For, where my heart is, my treasure will be, also.

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 5:10-23; Acts 7:30-34

Contributor: Zaweria Hunyu

A meditation on Psalm 91:1-2

This psalm reminds me when I was living in denial about my sexuality, I was always scared of people knowing the real me. I even went ahead to marry a man I never loved just to cover.

I was always on alert and afraid that people will notice me. But I am a living testimony God has been my protector. I was never harmed though there were intentions to do it.

This beautiful God covered me under His wings, I look back and I can say the protection of God has been over me.

Though I cannot say that in today's world we are safe as lgbt community, at least the world knows we are there and yes, we have Christians who are lgbt, that have chosen to stand by their faith in Christ.

Let us all love our God and acknowledge Him as our Lord because He has promised to answer us when we call unto Him and He will rescue us in times of trouble.

If we do this, long life will be our portion.

Contributor: Jimmy

He is my refuge and my fortress. If I make God, the God that I hear to be the Most High God, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, my refuge and fortress, why do I feel vulnerable to both petty and vicious experiences? How can the Bible seemingly promise a life where no harm can overtake me, yet I repeatedly find myself beset by pain, grief, fear, and anxiety?

In CS Lewis' book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, I am reminded of God's goodness and beauty, sometimes hard to see. Lewis grapples with apparent contradictions that simultaneously thank God for His grace and mercy while also writing of judgment and anguish. Psalms, a depiction of Scripture as whole, speaks to the perfection of God while witnessing the depravity of life. Through Psalms, Lewis encourages us to engage Scripture, not as an encyclopedia but rather, "steeping ourselves in its tone or temper and so learning its overall message" (Lewis, p130).

I find myself today in a place of reminding. How do I believe in a God perfect in love, beauty, and goodness while encountering chaos in and around my life?

There is a common thread of who God is regardless of circumstance. It's that same thread, through the difficult to understand portions of Scripture, pointing all the way to Jesus. It is that thread of truth, love, compassion, grace, forgiveness, and mercy existing throughout.

May you become more aware of the full goodness and beauty of God today.

Friday, March 4, 2022

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 6:1-13; Acts 7:35-42

Contributor: Zaweria Hunyu

When Moses had an encounter with God, he was in the bush looking after his uncle's cow, he was in exile and was not a fluent talker, but God had chosen to use him to glorify His name.

Moses was scared because he thought he was not good enough to be used by God. But for forty years God was with him in the wilderness as he was the one mediating directly with God.

When God promised to go with Moses, Moses could have doubted the small still voice but he chose to obey.

As I reflect on this, I focus on our rural church here in Kenya. The voices of lgbt persons are not valued or deemed important.

But even in today's church, God Is using the ones who are seen as not worthy in the society to glorify His name.

I can proudly say, God has been faithful. That today I have a fellowship I can identify with.

It has been a blessing to know I am not ashamed of myself as I head to God's calling in my life as I wait for that "still voice."

Contributor: Jimmy

Liberation! Speaking of yesterday's common thread, liberation is one clearly seen throughout Scripture. Since Adam and Eve were sent away from the garden, God has sought a way to liberate us from sin and death, to ultimately rejoin us with Him. His heart was always for the oppressed and against the oppressor. His desire is to free us.

In Exodus, God tells Moses, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment" (Exodus 6:6, NIV).

However, in Acts, Stephen speaking of their ancestors' response to Moses says, "Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt" (Acts 7:39, NIV). The people rejected the freedom God offered them.

These last few years, I realized how I can be my own greatest oppressor, causing my own suffering. I am hard on myself where God is not; I think I need to achieve perfection, punishing myself when God's intent has been for liberation all along. Instead of embracing God's promise to free me and redeem me, I foolishly choose to return to a metaphorical Egypt of shame, pride, stupidity, et. al.

May you be reminded today that your chains are broken, and that God offers you freedom daily in Christ. Let go of your captivity and be liberated.

Saturday, March 5, 2022

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; John 12:27-36

Contributor: Zaweria Hunyu

Surely there is a time for everything, there was a time I was in my own cocoon that was filled with shame and fear. I feared waking up one day and finding myself in hell.

But that is now in the past. I am living my authentic self like a lesbian that God created me to be.

There is a time for everything, and that is why we have different seasons. God is the creator of all seasons that we go through in this life. This magnifies that He is the sovereign God. The creator of heaven and earth and everything that is in it.

There is nothing that happens in this world that gets our God by surprise. That is why I say he is the author and perfecter of my faith.

Jesus knew His hour had come to be crucified in obedience. He knew what awaited Him when He said, "The hour has come that the son of man should be glorified."

Our Lord Jesus accepted to be crucified to fulfill God's plan of redeeming mankind, and all I am required to do, is to embrace the cross, be a good ambassador of Christ and desire holiness.

No matter the times we are living in, God is in control and he will always be there for us no matter the season.

God's time is the best.

Contributor: Jimmy

If any book in Scripture portrays the depressing reality of life, it is Ecclesiastes. It is one of my favorite books, showing an honest and shared humanity (the same reason I love sad music, but I digress). Ecclesiastes describes different seasons in life, the good and bad, the easy and the difficult times, the contradictions. It's included as wisdom literature alongside Proverbs while also seemingly mocking the absolute truths presented in Proverbs.

How do we handle the unsettling reality that includes both life and death, the ultimate contradiction? How can life and death coexist? How can there be a time for both as written in Ecclesiastes? When you know true goodness and beauty, when you know the true God, how can you accept any sort of death? Mulling over these contradictions is like considering infinity. Yet Jesus Himself did just this. Jesus, the Son of God, the source of all life faced death itself, the greatest contradiction of all. It wasn't an accident; He knew what was coming and ultimately accepted His fate as described in John 12. However, the story didn't end there for Jesus, and it won't end there for us as we abide in Him.

I believe we need to approach life's contradictions like Jesus did. We see them, we grieve them, we are pained by them, yet we know that a whole and complete picture of God, and of Scripture, does not end in death but in life.

May God bring you into wholeness today, embracing the tension and contradictions that exist knowing that God's love, goodness, and beauty ultimately triumph. Furthermore, may you actively bring that wholeness into the lives and communities of all those around you.

Contributor: Jeremy Emmert

In the Shadow of Shaddai
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Rationality can be both a friend and a foe. Rationality is a reliable tool of protection in the earthly realm but becomes more unreliable in the spiritual realm. Not appreciating this fact sets us up to be tricked by our very own senses. Rationality is paradoxical in that it should be both naturally trusted and deliberately questioned. The concept of God Almighty or Shaddai is an example where rationality can deceive us.

Psalm 91:1 says, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty...(NIV). Some translations use the word Shaddai in place of Almighty. The Psalmist goes on to describe how we can trust God who will be our refuge and fortress. Psalm 91:10-11 says, “If you say, ‘The Lord is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent” (NIV).

Our modern minds are prone to resist this. We are particularly prone to believe that faith in God protects us from harm. So, what do we do with those sorts of rational reservations? We may want to believe that God is our protector, but certain challenges here on earth can test that trust.

Perhaps Psalm 91 is one of those scriptures that was written in such a way that it was meant to be repeated until the truth of the words matches the reality of our present challenge. Repetition of truth makes it readily available when it is needed the most. With truth like this written on our hearts and minds when times get tough the Holy Spirit can work them into our specific circumstances in ways that will give us testimonies in our trials.

The truth is we can rely on God even when every single rationale sense indicates the contrary.

Even when it seems things have spun out of control. Are we equipped with the truth for these types of times inevitably will come?

Prayer: God, I sometimes struggle to fully trust you in all areas of my life. God be with me in the gaps between what I know to be true and what I feel is true. I trust your ability to lead me through complex situations where my senses deceive me.

Reconciliation: For many well-intentioned people, being a gay Christian is not rationale. As gay Christians, loving those who despise us is not optional for us, correct? How do we cope with words that hurt?

Contributor: Nancy Wanja Mwangi

As I reflect on today’s scriptures, I see the faithfulness of our God from ages ago.

God had established a covenant with the Israelites. He had walked with them for 40 years in the wilderness, fighting their battles. And now that they were finally in the promised land, Moses was reminding them to never forget where they had come from. Deuteronomy 16: 10 “and then celebrate the first harvest festival, to honor your God, by bringing him a free will offering in proportion to the blessings he has given you.”

Obedience was the condition for enjoying the benefits of the covenant God had made with the Israelites. And because they were finally settled in a fertile land as they had been promised, they had all the reasons to praise Him. God has always acted on behalf of the powerless and blessed them with abundance, God continues to redeem the powerless when they choose to be obedient and faithful.

There is a verse that I really love, Romans 10:11, “Whosoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.” This includes everyone because in verse 12 it continues to say, “because there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; God is the same Lord of all and richly blesses all who call to Him.”

My call for the afflicted, especially the LGBTQ+ community, is call upon the Lord for help and they will be saved. Even Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, and He won over the devil. Let us all obey and be faithful to our calling till the end.

Monday, March 7, 2022

[Psalm 17; 1 Chronicles 21:1-17; 1 John 2:1-6](#)

Contributor: Jeremy Emmert

Recognizing the Joab in Our Midst
1 Chronicles 21:1-17

I would rather not think that there are evil forces out there that might attempt to actively deceive me into wrong decision making, yet that narrative is woven throughout all of scripture. Satan directly tested Jesus. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (NIV).

Satan’s temptation of King David in 1 Chronicles is a peculiar one. It appears that Satan tempts or tricks King David into conducting a military census – not exactly the mother of all sins in my mind eye, but let’s read it. 1 Chronicles 21:1 reads, “Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.” David then instructs his servant Joab to conduct a military census to count the strength of David’s army.

Joab objects to the census. In verse 3 of chapter 21 Joab replies, “May the Lord multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord’s subject?” (NIV).

Despite Joab’s objection he does conduct the census and report’s back to David. In verse 8 we see that David comes to regret his decision and sees it as a great sin. The Chronicler does not tell us exactly why David changed his mind or whether Joab played a role. We aren’t told why a military census was a sin, but only that Joab recognized it as such.

God puts all kinds of people in our lives. The people in our lives have vantage points and ways of seeing that we do not. Nobody is suggesting we take every piece of advice we are given, but rather that we need to be vigilant that we don’t miss our Joab moment. The moment when the truth of the matter is coming from a place where we were not looking.

Prayer: God help us filter the opinions of people around us. Help us be soft and gentle in receiving criticisms and suggestions. Help us not miss your still small voice inside our consciences and in the words and actions of those around us. Help us recognize the Joabs in our midst.

Reconciliation: Is there someone in your life with whom you feel you need to reconcile or reconnect with? Could someone you have grown distant from be the very Joab you need?

Contributor: Nancy Wanja Mwangi

Our only hope in this wicked world can only be found in God. We are surrounded by enemies, and all they want is to destroy us. The prayer of David in this psalm reminds me once I was in a really hard situation, all I could see and smell was death. But God being my deliverer, I was saved from the jaws of death. Here is my story.

I was married to this man not because I was in love with him but because his father was a good friend to my father. As African tradition used to dictate, a woman has no power over a man and you have to do what your father orders you to do. That is how I got married though I knew there was no love between us. Life was hard living with him, and mostly I could find myself in tears. I sought solace in the word of God, but the way I had been taught the Bible, I knew I was a sinner for being a lesbian woman. I felt rejected, and I hated myself. My husband always thought I hated him, but I was dealing with my own crisis. He used to rape and abuse me mentally and physically. I used to cry out to God all the time, and I felt like He doesn’t love me.

Our God is faithful and our ways are not His ways. I met a pastor who I had no idea was an ally to the LGBTQ+ community, and he introduced me to a friend of his who is a lesbian woman. We became friends, and I can proudly say right now she is my pastor and a good friend. I am fully recovered, and the joy of the Lord is my strength. I am trusting God that I will be able to work with LGBTQ+ youths that they will not go through what I went through. Jesus is a miracle worker, and as he performed the first miracle at the wedding, He will continue manifesting in the lives of queer people all over the globe.

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

[Psalm 17; Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21](#)

Contributor: Jeremy Emmert

Why I Like Reading the Bible

Job 1:1-22

I sometimes feel inadequate reading the Bible. The stories are complex and have many layers of meaning. I know the books weren't written in English, so I am aware of the limitations therein.

I understand much of the cultural context has been lost to time. Despite these facts and other reservations, I like reading the Bible. In short, I like reading the Bible because it is alive. The Spirit can deliver exactly what my soul needs to hear from any given text if I just submit to the process of reading.

The book of Job is an iconic example. It is at the center of the most complex of religious questions. How can a good God permit evil? How should we handle suffering? What is the nature of justice? What is the nature of God? To me the power of scripture is not always in the answers it gives to these huge theological questions, but rather in the imagery the words evoke.

In verse 20, Job has just been stripped of material wealth. All his children have been killed in a freakish natural disaster. According to the text, this has all happened in rapid sequence and Job's response is, "Naked I came from mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (NIV).

I find real tangible hope in the beauty of Job's prayer to his horrific circumstances. Maybe you do or maybe you don't. I would completely understand if you didn't. After all, the big question remains – why did God allow this to happen? But I hope that underscores the point of why it is important to press through reading even passages that don't make sense on the surface. We press on because Bible reading is as much a journey as it is a destination for a particular answer to a particular question.

Do you need to reconnect with the Bible today?

Prayer: God I admit all the concerns I have about reading the Bible. Give me understanding as I read Your word. Give me an open mind as I seek You in language and stories that are unfamiliar to my own culture. I trust that You can overcome every limitation I have in seeking You out more.

Reconciliation: Have you been hurt by the Bible? Have you been hurt by the church? Have you been hurt by Christians? How will you make peace today?

Contributor: Nancy Wanja Mwangi

God hates sin and rebellion. And as David had discovered only repentance would restore him to God. He recognizes God as the savior and guide in a world full of wicked people. Though David had sinned against God, he still knew the only place he could be safe was in the arms of God.

Sometimes the world judges us so harshly because of our sexual orientation. They call us names and reject us. But God is calling us back home, God wants to give us a robe of righteousness and put holiness upon our heads in place of filthy clothes and earthly thinking.

Mostly and especially in my family, if anything bad happens they always point fingers at the LGBTQ+ community. Even when Covid 19 struck, I was shocked to be told it's the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah that God is punishing. Let's all know our God is faithful and He will restore us. Forgiveness of our sins is the Lord's work. If we are humble and seek Him in holiness and truth, he removes our guilt and grants us purity.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus be with us all.

Contributor: Jeremy Emmert

Redeeming Words

2 Peter 2:4-21

I have always thought the word “depraved” was an ugly verb. Dictionary.com defines depraved as, “to make morally bad or evil; vitiate; corrupt.” Perhaps I have a negative visceral reaction to the word because I have seen it used in unproductive and weaponized ways.

Peter has redeemed the word for me. In 2 Peter 2:19, he writes, “They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for ‘people are slaves to whatever has mastered them’” (NIV).

Peter is calling depraved the things that can enslave us. As we all know, too much of any good thing can become bad. That means there is no object hierarchy of sins that are so bad that some deserve the word depravity attached to them. Rather, any activity or thought or behavior that enslaves us would qualify for the description depraved.

For Peter, depravity is not something we blame on someone else’s bad conduct but something we use to guard our hearts. He suggests we each maintain personal vigilance in protecting our wants and desires from becoming something that can dominate us. Using the concept of depravity as a tool of self-reflection as opposed to a weapon of accusation redeems the word for me.

God wants to redeem all the damaged and broken areas of our lives. His redemptive quality knows no bounds. God can even redeem our understanding of words that might have been used in the past to stigmatize us.

Prayer: God show me areas of my life that need redemption – even small areas that may not be clear to me. Help me understand that self-control is an act of liberation not limitation. Holy Spirit guard my heart. I ask for wisdom in how I think about and interact with the world around me.

Reconciliation: What areas of your life would you like to see God’s redeeming power work?

Words? Relationships? Thoughts? Habits?

Wednesday, March 9 devotional continues on the next page

Contributor: Sontaia Briggs

Faith Put to the Flesh Test: Book of Job, 1:1-22 ESV, MSG)

Do you find yourself complaining, not aloud but in your mind? Does your mind respond to challenges with these statements: why me, just my luck, and if God was a comedian look at my life for proof?

Not these exact phrases, but you understand what I am illustrating. Quietly in our minds, we question the harshness of life and rejoice in the joys. We say why us, why now?

I say look to the life of Job. Job is described as blameless, upright, and a man who looked away from evil. He was an ideal servant, and God still allowed for the devil to put him through the faith flesh test.

Job's life was an example of his faith. He was dutiful and abundantly blessed. Job was the 'faith,' in the word faithful. Job even prayed for his children and made offerings in anticipation of their errors. If Job was good, why would God allow him to be tested? If we are praying, studying, making positive choices, living our lives in service of the betterment of society, why do we still struggle? This question is older than time, why do bad things happen to good people?

Job's story can offer us answers. One day the devil and God were having a conversation and God was bragging about Job. The devil responded making this interesting observation and statement to God: "Does Job fear God for no reason? (Job 1:9 ESV) Job did everything to please God and was rewarded. The devil was asking an important question: What had Job suffered or lost in spite of his faith? Would Job withstand the faith flesh test?

Job's faith hadn't been tested, only rewarded. God's response to the devil, "Do your worse; I have faith in Job." This action at first glance could be perceived as cruel. Why would God permit the devil to test Job? Faith. Job's faith was being put to the flesh test.

Have you considered Faith and Blessings as a two-way street with God? There is an exchange, a highway. God provides, and we are required to show up and be faithful. Our faithfulness is required even when God appears to be on blessings hiatus from our lives.

When God chooses to put our faith to the flesh test. The flesh test is God's greatest act of devotion to us. The Faith flesh test is a God response to your life; that means I trust you and you've got this.

The next time you find yourself saying why me? Remember the two-way road you are one with God. Consider that God is testing you because you are equipped. Trials are messy, but in every setback, your faith, spirit and resolve are strengthened.

Here is a mental exercise: when you are having a hard today, consider you have already overcome what you perceived as a hard day before this day. Meaning you are stronger than you think, and your faith has been tested and approved.

Thursday, March 10, 2022

[Psalm 27; Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Philipians 3:2-12](#)

Contributor: Sontaia Briggs

The Lighted Path to Rescue: Psalm 27 ESV, MSG

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be
afraid?” (Psalm 27:1 ESV)

Powerful words and entry points for this text. The book of Psalms function as a plea, thank you, and I’m sorry. Psalms are the humanizing scriptures in the Bible.

Whom shall, I fear?

Bravery is inspired through the examination of this text. When one utters these words phrased as a question; it challenges us to search our lives to call upon the evidence of our lived experiences.

These experiences are God’s response to this question. Our lives are the answers.

The light in our lives is the daily miracles and triumphs. The scripture calls and our life provides the context to our instruction. The resolution of our tragedies and pain comes, no matter the length of time. The resolution is in our stories although the answers are not swift or obvious at times.

For example, with grief, we know it passes in its unknowable period. It may reconfigure in our

hearts to make it tolerable, or life presents another perspective, a lesson to absorb the pain. Our perseverance becomes the example: the lighted path, the salvation, the stronghold.

The Lord is our stronghold - Stated as a proclamation is acknowledgment: that indeed you know where your strengths flow. Peace through the witness of our lives, triumphs, and tragedies. To witness is a stronghold. A call to rescue, a right to rescue is something we all seek in this human experience.

We journey toward the path of peace. Peace through the witness and testimony. The Lord will take you in - Psalm 27:10 (ESV) reminds us of the imperfect love of our fellow humans and world. “For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in.”

The world is a quick example of how alliances and relationships shift and the ambivalent nature of man. The light of God never extinguishes; it is without jealousy, disappointment, and expectation. God’s presence withstands and is a stronghold.

Reflection:

When your path is unclear and the challenges seem to abound, consider what you have already survived, endured. Consider what is already in your rearview mirror.

These examples are the ever-present divine stronghold and strength that you can and will survive.

The call: Whom shall I trust?

God’s response: Trust your lived story, your path, and how you have already been delivered.

Friday, March 11, 2022

[Psalm 27; Genesis 14:17-24; Philipians 3:17-20](#)

Contributor: Aaron Jackson

Charlie Brown is an optimist.

Let me explain.

Charlie Brown lost every baseball game he ever played, lost all his marbles (a rather on the nose metaphor) missed kicking every football, had a dog who referred to him as the “round headed kid” and lost hundreds of nickels getting bad advice for his troubles. He had every reason to give up, every reason to think that he was a failure, every reason to believe that things were not going to get better. Instead, he got up every day and tried again. He was an optimist.

I am reminded of Charlie Brown as I consider what it takes for me to keep going. At times, it feels like I will never get beyond the challenges of my life. They are at once tantalizingly close to being solved and frustratingly filled with an endurance that keeps them just beyond solution.

But that’s only part of the reality. God is also here, and he knows my troubles. God is the stronghold of my life (Psalm 27:1). And He is good. His love endures forever (Psalm 118:28).

That’s an endurance even my troubles cannot outrun.

In short, my faith is a source of strength, if only I acknowledge that God is the game changer, and that He wants me to praise Him as my God. God is the one who causes me to be confident when war breaks out (Psalm 27:3) in my life. He is the one who will receive me when my mother and father forsake me (Psalm 27:10).

Lord, I ask that You help me see You better. I ask that You turn my defeats into victories and my failures into successes. I ask that you keep me safe, and take the glory for yourself.

Thank you, Lord, for who’s I am.

Contributor: Aaron Jackson

God is For Us

At the climax of *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers*, the heroes find themselves at the end of hope.

The enemy has broken through their defenses, and they are a shattered door away from complete annihilation. Just as despair breaks the last of their spirit, the dawn light pierces the night, bringing with it a fresh army of battle-hardened soldiers to save the day. In the time it took a legion of horses to run down a hill, the battle had turned from a catastrophic defeat to a stunning victory.

My faith has often felt like that.

It is easy for me to forget that I am not living this life alone. It is easy for me to think that I am expected to push forward and succeed in life's challenges on my own strength. It's easy for me to lose sight of my light and salvation (Psalm 27:1) and fall into despair.

But God has declared that my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me (Psalm 27:6), that he will deliver my enemies into my hands (Genesis 14:20) and He has already given me victory over the challenges of life that come up, like a break-up, or financial difficulties, or a frustrating trip to the DMV.

Whatever challenges come up, God has placed me on an adventure, and a God who would place me on an adventure would not leave me to face that challenge without the help I need to see that adventure through to the very end.

As I go, God goes before me. I need only calibrate my perspective back to the reality that is no less true just because I cannot physically perceive it: God is, and God is for me. He will keep me safe in his dwelling and hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent (Psalm 27:5).

That's the reality, whether I'm facing an Orc Army or a DMV clerk. God, help me to remember that you have my back and that you are for me. Help me to boldly claim the victory that you have for me. Amen

Contributor: Tori Allen

Luke 9:28-29

“About eight days after Jesus said this, he went up on a mountain to pray. He took Peter, John and James with him. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed. His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning” (Luke 9:28-29 (NIV)).

As I read these verses about Jesus appearing to change in front of his friends, I am reminded of my faith journey. I was raised in the Mormon church. I was good at being a Mormon girl. I went to church each Sunday and scored the youth leadership positions. When I was 18, I earned the Young Womanhood Medallion, a gold pendant with a woman in a flowing dress, an outward indicator that I was progressing as one of the faithful.

When I went to college, I realized I was and always had been queer. I was no longer good at being Mormon. Who I loved, now made me unworthy and unfaithful. I began a decade-long journey of rationalization, guilt, and eventually self-understanding and acceptance.

I didn't come out to my family and close friends until I was almost 30. Yet still, people were remarkably surprised when I told them. Some accepted me for who I was, and others felt they had been betrayed or pretended they didn't understand, and I faded from their view.

As Peter, John, and James saw Jesus glowing and heard the voice telling them who He was, they were afraid and chose not to talk about it. (Luke 9:34-36 [NIV]). Yet, Jesus was the same Jesus. He had been telling them this all along. They just didn't really see Him.

May we truly see and celebrate each other. Amen.

Monday, March 14, 2022:

[Psalm 105:1-42; Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12](#)

Contributor: Rev. Kim Purl

Exodus 33:6 “Therefore the Israelites stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.” (NRSV)

“An Ordinary Journey”

The exhilaration of climbing and dangling by taut ropes, straps, and hooks in the craggy Rocky Mountains takes me far away from the stressors of my everyday lowland life of Missouri. Sky high creation demands that I focus on the immediate awe and power of God’s wonders, engulfed in a holy experience.

In Exodus 33 the Israelites are delivered from Egyptian slavery through the Red Sea into a wandering in the wilderness on their way to the promised land that God has gifted them. At a stopover in their wilderness wandering camping trip at Mount Sinai, aka Mount Horeb, the high altitude, holy experience of the engulfing presence of God was choking smoke, radiating fire, upheaving ground, deafening blasts, and body impacting thunder (Exodus 19).

They soon grew numb to the extreme display of God’s powerful mountain-top presence and in boredom formed a golden calf to worship that earned them immediate expulsion.

God’s anger sent them away from the holy mountain back to their lowland journey toward the promised land. God’s people were heavy with grief as God pointed out their deep flaws. In guilt they took off their mountaintop party clothes and returned to their lowland, wilderness life that led to the promised land.

On the jagged mountains I feel so close to danger, yet completely alive, and oxygen-deprived all at once. The thrill jolts me more than my common life at lower altitudes, but I know if I stay in the mountains my body will adjust and short windedness will subside. In a reversal, the high mountains will become ordinary life and the lowlands will become intriguing.

The Lenten season is a reversal that calls us away from our smoke and mirrors, and spiritual thrill-seeking to find God present in all the ordinary of me and you. Lent is opening our soul for God to search and speak honestly, to judge us, and we receive it. We hold the truth God reveals about us, and we take up the ordinary journey toward promised land. As a reversal, ordinary journeys are anything but ordinary.

Miracles spring forth at every turn: water from rock, manna and quail from heaven, shoes that do not wear out.

Living authentically with God is holy work. Let’s lean into this kind of work together.

Prayer: Lord, as I sit in stillness right now, reveal a truth that I am resisting, and the golden calves I have sculpted that are betraying me. Lead me into authentic love, truth, hope, faith. Lead me into the work of living on the ordinary way.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022:

[Psalm 105:1-42; Numbers 14:10b-24; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)

Contributor: Rev. Kim Purl

Numbers 14:22-24a, “...none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it. But my servant Caleb,” (NRSV)

“Longing for Slavery”

The report from the Promise Land spies was dismal. The enemy was too great, too big, too vast to ever conquer, yet two spies, Joshua and Caleb, saw these odds as God’s problem. The Israelites sided with the dismal reports and planned to choose another leader who would rush them back to Pharaoh, because the old saying goes, “If you have to choose between devils, choose the devil that you know.” How could they throw away freedom after coming so far? They were delivered from slavery, crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, drank water from the rock, and never missed a manna meal. Miracles all around and it seemed they could take no more awe and wonder. They longed for slavery.

Humanity is strange like that. We easily yearn to return to our familiar past, even if it harms us, and although we have enjoyed God’s miracles and freedom at every turn. New paths require the arduous work of staring down fears and holding that new space for God’s promise to break in further.

I confess that as a newly minted online pastor I have faced big, hairy obstacles that had me longing to return to the brick-and-mortar church structure that I had known my whole life. Deep down I knew going back would not be my happy place. Diverse ministry freedom would be traded back if I returned to a traditional church congregation, so I press on in the way God has for me with great wonder.

What has been spiritual bondage that you long to return to? Can you face the fear of the unknown and live into authentic spiritual freedom leaving longings behind that would return you to bondage? Do you find yourself second guessing this new space where you find fulfillment and struggle as God unfolds a new thing in you? May you see the fullness of the promise as Caleb did when he and Joshua stepped across the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

Prayer: Lord, help us with courage to continue to release the past and see it in truth. Lead us by your Spirit through the new work and journey into your life-giving promises.

Wednesday, March 16, 2022:

[Psalm 105:1-42; 2 Chronicles 20:1-22; Luke 13:22-31](#)

Contributor: Rev. Kim Purl

2 Chronicles 20:1-22

“Thus says the Lord to you; ‘Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God’s.’” 2 Chronicles 20:15b (NRSV)

King Jehoshaphat got terrifying news: three enemy groups had formed a surrounding invasion of his country. There was no way out. The only option was to gather everyone and pray, calling out to God, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You.” (2Chronicles 20:12b NRSV)

Terrifying news is paralyzing. Thinking through the next steps becomes overwhelming. Reaching outside of ourselves, fixing our eyes on the Lord, and asking others to pray with us to perceive God’s help is the way through.

As they gathered in prayer, the priest, Jahaziel, was filled with the Spirit of God and prophesied, “The battle is not yours but God’s....Take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the Lord on your behalf.”

(20:17a NRSV) King Jehoshaphat led his people in prayer. At the appointed time of battle the people were assembled to sing and praise the Lord in worship. The Lord set an ambush of confusion on their enemies. The battle was won by the Lord as the people worshipped.

Has terrifying news come recently? Surrendering our need to be in control, pray together and seek the heart of the Lord. This battle does not belong to you, it belongs to the Lord. What song will you sing at a time like this? What praise do you have while the Lord fights for you? Do you perceive the enemy turning on itself? The Lord is taking care of the conflict.

Prayer: Lord God of all peace, guide us in this season of humbleness to pray, sing, and praise, allowing you space to resolve our conflicts however great or small.

Thursday, March 17, 2022:

[Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 3:19-30; Revelation 2:8-11](#)

Contributor: Rev. Kim Purl

“They disobeyed the king’s command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.” Daniel 3:28b (NRSV)

What a surprise to learn the historical St Patrick was not Irish. He was born in Roman Britain in the late 300sAD, kidnapped at the age of sixteen, and taken to Ireland as a slave. Patrick escaped for home, but later returned to Ireland around 432AD as a Christian missionary. When he died March 17, 461AD, he had established monasteries, churches, and schools among neighbors who were once enemies. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Saint-Patricks-Day>)

St Patrick’s life of slavery and testimony inspires us like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Theirs is also a story of the crude horror of war and abduction of youth into foreign slavery. In obedience to God alone they refused to worship their oppressors, surrendering their bodies to harsh consequences, even death. Walking out of the fiery furnace, their deliverance from the enemy is testimony of faith that led their oppressors to confess the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as the true God. In turn, enemies were humbled to become neighbors.

This devotional begs for you to tell your story of redemption. What earthly power structure do you submit to in body? Do you find yourself in holy resistance when that structure requires your worship? What oppression have you, or will you face, when you confess faith in God and identify as LGBTQ+ or an LGBTQ+ advocate or friend? May the fruit of your faith be a testimony for God, and turn enemies into unlikely friends and neighbors.

Prayer: Lord, grant us faith like St Patrick, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego so that our life is a testimony of God’s love and salvation, with the power to change enemies to unlikely neighbors.

Friday, March 18, 2022:

[Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 3:19-30; Revelation 2:8-11](#)

Contributor: Rev. Kim Purl

Friday, March 18

“I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God.” (Revelation 3:1b-2, NRSV)

An LGBTQ+ friend made a good observation. Traditional churches that strive to be LGBTQ+ welcoming could provide a non-binary family restroom, deemphasize men’s and women’s ministries welcoming any gender to special events, and even offer helps for pronoun use. These would be encouraging changes, but will these churches really love LGBTQ+ people for who they authentically are, or lure them in with a motive to change their orientation?

This is a point well taken. For too long traditional church has loved all people into her doors to become discontent when folks fail to convert and conform. This is a conditional, limited love.

A traditional church member made a good observation. What is a traditional believer to do with the un affirming personal convictions they have held their whole life in regards to LGBTQ+? How do they reconcile personal convictions and the call to love?

This is a point well taken. Everyone has reasons for holding to their personal convictions. But how do we not harm? How do we not lose the precious loving relationships between the affirming and non-affirming?

The answer is love. Love always wins. In holy dialogues we respect one another’s personal convictions, because everyone’s beliefs are important. If we want to strengthen relationships our personal beliefs must take a bow to let the expression of the love of Jesus be far more important than winning wars about personal beliefs. May your love be perfect in the sight of God.

Prayer: Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit to love like you love the world. You show no partiality. May the way we love be pleasing in your eyes.

Saturday, March 19, 2022:

[Psalm 63:1-8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 6:43-45](#)

Contributor: Jeremy Emmert

I have been attending my church's small group consistently for over 3 years now.

The small group was started in a traditional evangelical church, with traditional views of sexuality, for people in our church who are LGBTQ or who are same sex attracted (SSA). That means in our small group we have both people who have reconciled their sexuality with their faith and those who have not.

We also have people in our group who call themselves Christians and others who are uncertain of the existence of God. In our small group, everyone can take a turn leading the discussion of a passage if they so choose.

We really have one major rule in our group. The rule is that you should bring all of who you are to the study and leave nothing at the door. We believe that everybody deserves to have a relationship with God no matter what place they start with God.

Our collective seeking has always been a beautiful image of the word faith for me. The kind of transformative faith that Paul wrote about in Philippians 3:9, "What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes by the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith" (NIV).

I have observed righteous by faith come to life when people with very different backgrounds and points of view come together to lay all of that aside for a couple of hours to read together with open minds and hearts. It is a sacred experience that words can't really do justice. I can only say there is great value in small groups. There is great value in taking time out of our busy weeks to deliberately do life with other people, no matter their background or belief.

Prayer: God help me find those around me who share my desire to grow spiritually. God show me those around me who I can deliberately grow in life together with no matter what their viewpoint.

Give me eyes to see others how you see them, as reflections of the divine. Amen

Reconciliation: For LGBTQ or SSA Christians, religious life can be isolating and daunting. What role does each of us play in making sure nobody feels alienated from knowing and growing in God?

The March 18 devotional continues on the next page

Saturday, March 19, 2022:

[Psalm 63:1-8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 6:43-45](#)

Contributor: Rev. Kim Purl

“...the Lord expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!” (Isaiah 5:7b, NRSV)

My counselor looked at me with compassion and honestly told me, “You really can do everything right and end up with something you did not want.” When truth speaks it’s not exactly the news we were hoping for.

The Lord’s struggle with the children of Israel is a story where the Lord God did everything right and ended up with something undesirable. Isaiah describes it in this way: the Lord planted the perfect vineyard with quality vines; then set up the best wine-making equipment, expecting good wine from well-planned and executed efforts; and then the shocking discovery: sprouts of wild grapes. Wild grapes are sour and small, unlike the cultivated plumper and sweet grapes of winemaking. The Lord did everything right and did not get the result that was hoped for.

How often have we experienced this frustration? I once hosted an LGBTQ+ training workshop to educate traditional churches how to be welcoming and loving. The training was met with mixed responses, as you could imagine. As host, I prayed for listening ears to what the Spirit would say. I hoped for the best outcome, I planned for it, I even executed the perfect plan, but the results were disappointing. Divisive accusations and misunderstandings led to the decision to not further discuss divisive issues such as LGBTQ+.

What I did not expect was a surprising turn.

Wild grapes, which are labor intensive, do have benefits. The sour taste does have a greater amount of good acidity and vitamin C than their domesticated sweeter cousins that make fine wines.

Even though divisive issues may be banned in some contexts, this does not stop families and friends from seeking out help and guidance in how to best love their LGBTQ+ family members. Nothing can stop love. Not even rules that have been formed to keep us from talking about how to radically love.

And nothing stopped God’s love either.

Prayer: Lord, when we do everything right, and everything wrong seems to happen, remind us of your example. If you overcame an unjust death and the grave, we have hope that our situation can be resurrected as well.

Contributor: Adrian Slonaker

Isaiah 55:1-9

“Come, buy wine and milk...why spend money on what is not bread...listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.” (Isaiah 55:1-2 [NIV])

“Invitation to the Thirsty” could almost be a clever bit of marketing for a flashy restaurant chain. Food and drink are not merely essential for survival, but they also have the power to brighten our moods and to draw people together in communal joy and sharing. Even the most secular individual who’s ever wolfed down a pint of Ben & Jerry’s after a breakup or gorged on pizza at a slumber party might agree with that statement.

Once God has the listeners’ (and readers’) mouths watering, God implores, “Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David” (Isaiah 55:3 [NIV]). The “richest of fare” is spiritual food - divine love and support that can sustain, uplift and satisfy us even more than the most flavorful morning glory muffins. And best of all, “and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!” (Isaiah 55:1 [NIV]).

This fulfillment is available to everyone, from fabulously wealthy to destitute, at no material or financial cost.

When we plan a menu, there are often multiple options available – from vegan chili sin carne to filet mignon to chocolate-covered pretzels. Similarly, there are many ways to take advantage of God’s invitation. Some may be called to the priesthood or ministry or to mission work.

Others may become members of church congregations. And there are those who prefer a highly personal relationship with God away from group worship, opting instead for quick prayers in the shower or on the bus. It’s all valid! What matters is to make time to accept and contemplate God’s unconditional love and to be willing to listen to God’s messages and nudges.

As a non-binary and queer person, I have to smile at the mention of God’s “faithful love promised to David.” While the exact nature of David’s relationship to Jonathan, as depicted in the Books of Samuel, is debatable, it is described with achingly beautiful, intense language. For example, “After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself...And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.” (1 Samuel 18:1-4 [NIV]). And then there’s, “I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.” (2 Samuel 1:26 [NIV]).

“Invitation to the Thirsty” reminds and reassures us that God’s love is extended to everyone, regardless of whom we love deeply. Despite the unkind rhetoric spouted by some hateful and misguided individuals, God has offered to endow ALL of us “with splendor” (Isaiah 55:5 [NIV]).

And that’s at least as enticing as a mocha latte and a slice of red velvet cake.

Today I ask that you reflect on the splendor with which God has endowed you.

The March 20 devotional continues on the next page

Contributor: Marie Nganga

What a great invitation!

Come everyone who is thirsty. I will make a lasting covenant with you and give the promise I gave David. Turn to the Lord and pray to Him now that He is near (Isaiah 55: 8).

“My thoughts,” says the Lord, “are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. (Good News Bible).

David in Psalm 63 knew the secret as he said, “O, God, you are my God, and I long for you; like a dry, worn out, and waterless land, my soul thirst for you” (Psalms 63:1 Good News Bible).

Today David reminds me of the time I was giving my life to Christ; yes, I was baptized as it was our church tradition and even confirmed a Christian, but still I felt an emptiness in me. I needed to know God in a much deeper way.

I was thirsty to know God, even after I got saved, I still wanted to know this God. The yearning for God in me is still there, but today it is different because He has always been my help.

I feel safe in the shadow of His wings, and I always put on a smile even when in hard situations for I always feel His love and protection. God has taken me out of very difficult situations especially when I was outed as a lesbian. He has restored my faith, and I can proudly say I am a born again lesbian woman.

“Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps His promise, and He will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out” (1st Corinthians 10:13 Good News Bible).

Contributor: Marie Nganga

David poured his heart out to the Lord. This challenges me because many times we spend long hours crying our problems to other people.

There was a time I was to undergo a major surgery and I reached out to my immediate family, I thought at least they would come and visit even if we had a fallout when I was outed. To my surprise, none of them came.

But guess what, God gave me favor with the hospital nurses, and they were exchanging shifts to care for me. That is why today before I share my problem with anyone, I will first talk to my Lord and He always directs me to the right persons to share with.

As Christians we face many trials, but when we trust the process that God is with us, we emerge even stronger. Throughout the Bible, God expresses deep love for the Israelites. Yes, they were unfaithful. They rejected God's endearment and love.

Though God held His people in such dear regard, that would not stop His appropriate judgment against them. God's judgement is just and He does it out of love. But sometimes we want to "play" God and act as "the judge."

We are all guilty at judging others. I am also a victim. Mostly we do it without realizing it, but if you listen to your inner voice, you will prove me right.

I remember one day when one of my fellowship members was so sick in the hospital. He was questioning God over so many things, "I am sick because I am gay. If I was not gay, I could have the support of my whole family." And I was telling him, "Relax! Take it easy!"

Then I heard an inner voice telling me, remember you tried suicide three times. I just prayed for forgiveness and realized that I have been blind so many times to my own fault.

If there is something that has contributed to the many suicide reports of LGBTQ+ persons, it is homophobia. They have already taken the Lord's seat and declared we are not supposed to exist. Let them know their day will come, and they will also face judgment.

The March 21 devotional continues on the next page

Contributor: Adrian Slonaker

“Confidence is sexy.” “Like attracts like.” “You have to fake it to make it.” We’re bombarded with messages about how we have to march through life like Stormtroopers from Star Wars, taking anything that comes with unflinching assertiveness and a never-ending flow of grace. Overt vulnerability and terror are frowned upon.

And yet in Psalm 39, super-king and über-warrior David (you know, the dude who slew friggin’ Goliath!) comes across as a quivering, Jello-like mess fraught with uncertainty. He owns up to his self-doubt. The Psalm starts out “I said, ‘I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked.’ So I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good. But my anguish increased; my heart grew hot within me. While I meditated, the fire burned” (Psalm 39:1-3 [NIV]). I could almost imagine David gritting his teeth, reading inane and ignorant comments from internet trolls and know-it-alls on Reddit, trying to maintain his equanimity, but failing, as many of us do.

He asks God, “Show me, Lord, my life’s end...You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be.” (Psalm 39:4-6 [NIV]). Translation: “What’s the point of it all in this vanishingly brief lifetime? How does any of this stuff we slog through on a daily basis matter?”

David admits, “But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools.” (Psalm 39:7-8 [NIV]). David is aware that, all by himself, he can’t avoid messing up. He’s not a fully self-reliant superman. Fortunately, he doesn’t behave like a driver, who, too proud to ask for directions, continues to get increasingly lost on the wrong route. David requests the assistance that he needs: “Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help” (Psalm 39:12 [NIV]).

Further explaining his sense of discombobulation, David claims, “I dwell with you as a foreigner, a stranger” (Psalm 39:12 [NIV]). Those of us who have transferred our lives to a new country, city, school or job might perhaps relate to David’s queasy feeling of “not belonging” in an environment with which we’re not familiar, among people we don’t know.

And yet David does belong, as we all do, in the presence of God, who offers love, help and a spiritual home to all of us. And as David demonstrates, it’s all right to feel afraid, messy, and insecure sometimes. That’s part of being human in a tricky, overwhelming world. Moreover, this sense of stomach-churning alienness is frequently exacerbated in LGBTQIA2S+ individuals who, from birth, must learn to navigate through a majority-straight world while all too often being discouraged, ridiculed and marginalized (or worse).

Tuesday, March 22, 2022:

[Psalm 39; Ezekiel 17:1-10; Romans 2:12-16](#)

Contributor: Denise Hamblen

Greetings dear friends in Christ. What a joy it is to have this opportunity to share some thoughts about today's reading Psalm 39; Ezekiel 17:1-10 and Romans 2:12-16.

The timing of these readings really hit home for me as I fell ill with Covid last month. Thankfully, my symptoms were relatively mild. But, given the tragic loss of life we have seen these last two years, I certainly was more aware of just how fragile life is.

It is that same fragility David struggled with in this Psalm. How do we make our lives count for eternity? How do we remain focused on our one true hope in God? Life is so transient, and, because it is, we must live for the Lord. No truer words have been written than, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

In this Psalm, David is struggling with some illness. It could be that he connected this illness to a sin he committed or he could be referencing the suffering we all endure because of the inherent brokenness of the world. Derek Kidner observed that, "the burning question of this psalm is why God should so assiduously discipline a creature as frail and fleeting as man" (Psalms 1:155 [IVP]).

David's suffering reminded him of just how short life is, and he prays that God would not let him forget this. He repeats "surely every man at his best is a mere breath" twice in this psalm. He compares the shortness of this life to eternity with God, "Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight" (5). When I look at the width of my own hand, I am reminded of just how short this life is.

Whatever we do, it all comes to an end at death. There is a legend that tells of a merchant in Baghdad, who asks his servant to run an errand for him. While doing so, the servant crosses paths with Lady Death. Frightened, he runs back to his master and asks if he may take the fastest horse the master has and ride to Samarra. The master grants his request and the servant flees.

Later in the day, the merchant went into town and also crosses paths with Lady Death. He confronts her, asking, "Why did you startle my servant?"

Lady Death's response, "Frankly, it was I who was startled. I couldn't understand why your servant was in Baghdad when I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra." This is a reminder that none of us will escape our appointment.

For me, the most important lesson David teaches in this psalm is found in his words, "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You." We can put our hope in things of the world, fill our lives with stuff, but, in the end, our hope is not found in the car we drive or the house in which we live.

During my university studies, the movie *Schindler's List* was released. As a history major with an emphasis on European History, this was a movie I wanted to see. One of the final scenes has stayed with me all these years. As the war was coming to an end, Oskar Schindler was able to buy the freedom of the Jewish workers who labored in his factories. But he realized that he had the means by which to have saved even more people. But it was too late. He had held on to his wealth, only willing to part with a small amount in order to keep his workers. He laments, "I could have gotten more." He recognized how much money he had thrown away, and that he didn't do enough. He looks at a car, acknowledging he could have saved 10 people had he given it to the Nazis. He is overcome with grief for the lives he couldn't save. In the end, his wealth didn't matter. And it is true for all of us. In the end, the only hope that remains is in God.

And that Hope in God must propel us to action. Paul makes clear that simply possessing the law of God does not guarantee the favor of God. It is the doers of the good word of God who will be justified. We will be judged by our works. When we couple this with the frail nature of this world, it is clear that we as believers in Christ must also be doers in Christ.

As I age, I am more and more aware of how fast time goes by. I am a fan of comic books, specifically Marvel comic books. For my birthday this year, my niece gave me a t-shirt of a sloth wearing a Flash Gordan costume. It is the perfect reflection of where I am in life.

In my mind, I am as quick and nimble as Flash but, in reality, I am a sloth. But I am a sloth who knows my hope is found in God. As humble as my offerings are, they are done in the spirit of Christ.

May each of us recognize that, in this brief span of time we have here, we can accomplish much when we put our trust in the Lord.



Wednesday, March 23, 2022:

Psalms 39, Numbers 13:17-27, Luke 13:18-21

Contributor: Denise Hamblen

Back in the 1980s (I am giving away my age!) there was a popular song by George Michael.

One line from the song went on repeat in my mind as I read today's reading – "I gotta' have faith." Faith....it is faith in God, faith that our hope is found in God.

But, because our current path is in this broken world, there are times when we question. Even when we have received the good word of God, there are times when we question. Even when, at the burning bush, Moses is promised that, "the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoke to you; do not fear or be discouraged." There are times when we question.

There was a poem I learned as a young adult. I wish I could remember the name of the author but the words are still imprinted in my heart and mind.

I do not claim,

Like Rembrandt or Michelangelo

To know the color of his hair

Or the shape of his face.

For who can paint

A voice

That can softly echo through the centuries and hold me –

As it did the windswept, dirty crowds –

With overwhelming peace?

Who can chisel in marble or shape in clay

Eyes,

That pierce a soul

Cleanse it with one burning look

And radiate enough love for a whole world?

I have never heard that voice.

I do not know the color of those eyes.

And yet, each night,

I close my eyes in prayer –

And see.

We are promised that, even if we have faith as small as a mustard seed, we can move mountains. Do we bind ourselves with God or with things of the world? David made it clear that he was not a stranger from God but rather a stranger with God. They journeyed together in a hostile world. Our challenge, as followers of Christ, is to bind ourselves to God so our efforts are in accordance with the will of God and not influenced by the world. What a challenge!! With all the noise and clanging, it can be difficult to hear God's word. How grateful I am for those quiet moments when I can still my soul and know that He is.

The March 23 devotional continues on the next page

Contributor: Marie Nganga

“Lord, how long will I live? When will I die?”

Tell me how soon my life will end. How short you have made my life! In your sight, my lifetime seems nothing. Indeed, every living being is no more than a puff of wind” (Psalms 39: 4-5 Good News Bible).

David reminds me of the song, “This World Is Not My Home” by Jim Reeves. I just realized we have been caught up in our day-to-day activities that sometimes we forget we are just passers-by on this side of the stars.

“No more than a shadow, all we do is for nothing; we gather wealth, but don’t know who will get it. What, then, can I hope for Lord? I put my hope in You” (Psalms 39: 6-7 Good News Bible).

This psalm reminds us that all the things of this world will fade away. But as he says his hope is in Christ. As I reflect on this today, I choose to put my faith rooted in Jesus Christ. It's only what's done for Christ will last forever.

“What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare the kingdom of God with” (Luke 13:18).

Jesus wanted people to understand the kingdom of God, Even in real life, many things start small and nobody knows what they may become in future. A mustard seed is very small and when it matures, it becomes a big tree with branches that houses many birds.

I am a witness to this testimony; I started an LGBTQ+ fellowship with only 3 members and as we speak now, we are over 20 and trusting God for growth.

May the Lord help us to be sowers of the seeds that will bear fruits in the lives of others and offer them shelter from the storms of life.

Thursday, March 24, 2022:

Psalms 32, Joshua 4:1-13, 2nd Corinthians 4: 16-55

Contributor: Marie Nganga

“Happy are those whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned” (Psalms 32:1 Good News Bible).

I am happy to know my sins are forgiven, I thank God for this day, I will not be discouraged.

Even if my outer nature is wearing out, I believe in a God who will renew my inner person day by day.

Dear God, I pray for my soul, remember me in your kindness, you are slow to anger, kindly let me drink and eat at your table. accept my humble heart and kindly renew my strength.

Let the world know I am your child. Give me strength to worship you in love and in Spirit. Amen.

The March 24 devotional continues on the next page

Thursday, March 24, 2022:

Psalms 32, Joshua 4:1-13, 2nd Corinthians 4: 16-55

Contributor: Malique Guinn

“For day and night, your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of the summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 32:3-5 [NIV]).

Hi, I’m Malique Guinn. For fifteen years, I dealt with perversion and a pornography addiction that stemmed from banter on elementary schoolgrounds. This was fifth grade. My classmate mentioned the website *Playboy*. He might have shown me images on a cell phone. Right then and there, a seed of curiosity was planted in my mind.

My favorite hobby as a child was playing video games. I would play on both my Playstation 1 console and on my parents’ computer. One day, I was home alone for quite some time. I was on the computer playing Looney Tunes football or Samurai Jack on the *Cartoon Network* website. Yes, I feel old. But getting older is a blessing. Glory to God! Anyways, I was playing for quite some time and that was when the serpent whispered sweet nothings into my ear for the first time. A few minutes later, I found myself on the *Playboy* website, scrolling through images for who knows how long. Then, I hear the front door open. I immediately closed the website and deleted the history. Y’all, I barely knew that deleting history was an option. But in that moment, I felt I had to conceal what would become a first step down a deep, dark path of porn addiction.

Why do I bring this up? I had difficulty coming to terms with the fact I had an addiction. I avoided the word “addiction” in my head. Even though it was the present truth, I knew it wouldn’t be my end. But, there was one thing I had to do: confess my iniquity. Now, I had the audacity, the temerity, the nerve, to pray and pray but did not fully repent. My prayers would be incomplete so as long as I didn’t tell my Father,

“Hey, I have a pornography addiction. This is what it is, but Lord, I ask that you give me the strength to pull me out of this.” I had never felt more liberated before in my life. I no longer felt shame or guilt, because God loves me with agape love.

What is something you’re dealing with in the dark that you haven’t brought to God yet? I ask that you give it to the Lord. We as humans are not strong enough to overcome on our own. God does not want to punish us. He wants to empower us. He wants to heal us. He wants us to be honest with Him. I mean, He is omniscient after all.

To you, I offer a practice. Write down a list of things you need to give to God. Be real. Be uncomfortable. Speak them out loud. Repeat them out loud. No one else needs to know what’s on your list, unless the Lord tells you to share with others. He loves His children, no matter what.

Blessings to you all.

Contributor: Malique Guinn

Then Jesus told them this parable, “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:3-7 [NIV]).

Have y’all ever been that lost kid in the store? Well, I can’t relate. I was stationed in the electronics section playing video game demos the whole time. My parents knew exactly where to find me.

On a serious note, I remember apologizing to my dad for my erratic behavior growing up. This was maybe in the last year or so. Tears streaming down my face and everything. I can be a bit dramatic at times, no lie. However, I felt a conviction for the wrongs I did. I had been disobedient. I had been defiant. I had been acting out.

You want to hear something embarrassing? I was expelled from preschool. Yup, I know. How in the world does that happen? I don’t even remember that event to be honest.

That brings me to my next point. My dad is the best dad in the world. He’s loving, considerate, patient, and gracious. Prior to my blubbering apologies, he would say,

“You’ve always been a great kid. You weren’t tripping.” In my mind I’m like, “Are we talking about the same me here?” So, when I did apologize and acknowledged my wrongs, he would tell me it didn’t matter and that he loved me. He doesn’t even think about who I was because he always saw me for what I could be and sees me as I am now. A young man who is not perfect, but one who continues to grow and develop in his walk with Christ.

I would also like to point out an important detail in this scripture, “Rejoice with me.” The key words here are “with me.” Also, it doesn’t say how long the lost sheep was away. All we know is that it was being pursued until it was found. It could’ve been a day. A week. A year. Ten years. Didn’t matter. And guess what? It didn’t say that anyone was tired once the sheep was found. The party began! Everyone rejoiced!

It is imperative that we are turned up to the max when someone gives their life over to Christ. It is the greatest commitment that a human can make. Listen and you’ll hear the speakers banging from Heaven up above.

The March 25 devotional continues on the next page

Friday, March 25, 2022:

Isaiah 7:10-14. Psalms 45. Hebrews 10:4-10. Luke 1:26-38

Contributor: Marie Nganga

Annunciation Day/Conception of Messiah

Mary could have been full of fear when the angels came to her with the good news. She could have wondered how Joseph and the society would react to the news of her being pregnant, and yet she was a virgin. But she chose to believe when the angels told her not to fear. Mary is called blessed, not only because she is the mother of the Lord, but for her trust in God's promise.

Sometimes we hinder God's blessings because of our unbelief. Our God delights in upsetting human expectations.

For many years, I was made to believe that LGBTQ+ community was destined to hell and that God hates us all. God is surprising this world by raising worshipers who are LGBTQ+.

Let's choose to believe like Mary did, and we shall be called blessed no matter what our status is in the society. Let's trust that God is coming to save us as we support each other with love and hope as we wait upon the Lord.

God's promises are true and amen, our Lord and Savior came to set us free. Jesus Christ taught us about obedience. He was faithful to God even in death. Let's all desire to be like Christ. Let's love, trust and obey.

Today I sing this song, "What can wash away my sins! Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Ooh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus" (Carrie Underwood).

Saturday, March 26, 2022:

Psalms 32. Exodus 32:7-14. Luke 15:1-10

Contributor: Marie Nganga

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them—what do you do?

You leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and go looking for the one until you find it. When you find it, you are so happy that you put it on your shoulders” (Luke 15:4-5 Good News Bible).

Amazing Grace.

Thank you, Jesus, for finding me, I was so lost, but you reached out to me. I was so blind, but you opened my eyes. Now all I can tell is about your Grace.

Song: “Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now I am found, I was blind but now I see.”

Prayer: Thank you God for the gift of life, and also for the knowledge to differentiate between good and bad. Make me your vessel and use me as you please. Amen

The March 26 devotional continues on the next page

Contributor: Malique Guinn

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 [NIV]).

I had a revelation last week during my quiet time with God as I read this scripture. The Spirit was telling me about the importance of doing everything with love. God loved the world so much that he gave us Jesus, and he died on the cross out of love for all of us. As God’s children, we must not lose heart or grow cold due to the ways of the world.

Allow me to be transparent. I am an artist, playwright, and screenwriter. Not too long ago, a piece I wrote was invited to be staged virtually for a festival. Of course, I’m ecstatic. Now for context, the festival moves very fast. It all takes place in a week. Casting, rehearsals, and the final reading take place from Wednesday to Saturday. Let’s just say, the process wasn’t as smooth as I hoped it would be. For our first rehearsal, three out of six actors were a no show, even though they committed to acting in the piece. At this time, I was a bit concerned but I knew that everything would still work out and that we would find replacements.

Let me skip ahead to Saturday. There was no rehearsal on Friday. That day was dedicated to finding replacement actors who were available for the reading on Saturday morning. The heads of the festival put forth their best efforts to find actors too. God bless them. Fortunately, they found replacements. Everything appears to be good to go.

Now, it’s Saturday morning. Tech rehearsal is at 7. At this time, only four of our actors were on time. Five minutes go by. Ten minutes go by. Twenty minutes go by. Now, I’m extremely frustrated. Livid. Add any synonym you want. I was that. As the time was going by, I was calling

on God to help me keep a level head. Then I just straight up told Him, “Lord, I’m frustrated.” I was over it at this point and decided to take my niece for a walk. My niece as in, the dog that my brother adopted. I love you Brenda!

Long story short, all of the actors showed up after all and the reading happened. Of course, the quality could’ve been better, but it happened. However, that week wasn’t about the play. It wasn’t about the festival. It was about a heart check. In the grand scheme of things, this was trivial. A momentary trouble. Above all, it was a trial to see where my heart and faith was. I had to call on God to remove the resentment I was feeling towards the actors and even all actors in general. Yup, I boxed all of them in and had to call on God to ensure that my heart didn’t grow cold.

I offer a practice to you. Create a heal prep.

Trust me, it’s a meal prep, but even better.

Start your week by writing down scriptures to meditate on for the week. For example, you can read 1 Peter from Monday through Friday. One book per day. Feast on the word. Spend time with Him. Ask Him to search your heart. Cook with love. Collaborate with love. Serve.

Contributor: Donna

A Reflection on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

“Grace doesn’t play by the rules.” The complaint came from 6-year-old Simon who protested the fact that his sister, Grace, picked up a game piece and moved it to what he understood to be an unfair position. “She rolled a 5 but moved it 6!” he complained. “I quit! It's not fair.” He had to be cajoled into moving on. It didn’t matter that he ultimately won the game. He wanted her shamed. He wanted justice. The perceived infraction ruined his own experience of joy and celebration.

This was years ago, but his protestation has stayed with me: “Grace doesn’t play by the rules!”

We enter into social covenants with certain expectations about ethics and behavior—the rules exist to guide us and keep our interactions peaceable and predictable. There is a consumer quality about these exchanges: if I do XYZ, I expect ABC to happen; it is an economy of transaction—this for that. We demand it because it is formulaic and lawful and orderly. It feeds our capitalist notions that the right behavior will naturally result in right outcomes.

But conformity is a strange insistence within Christian circles. As a people whose existence is formed in grace, the demand for conformity is incongruous at best; at worst it is petty (I had to suffer this so you should have to as well— an eat-your-young mentality).

It is evidenced in the text for today. One son demands that he be given (what is rightfully?) his; the other dutifully stands tall, fulfilling social expectations and demonstrating unwavering loyalty. While the first squanders the last of societal good will, the second holds his head high, having met all obligations.

But when love overwhelms the aberrancy and grace abounds, the wayward man is discovered nevertheless to be still the son of his Father. What a joyous occasion!

And here is where we need to challenge our own response to the text: Is our tendency to identify with the first or the second son? To identify with the first son exposes our vulnerability—our need for clemency and grace. But our tendency to identify with the second son (and it was the tendency of the grumbling Pharisees to whom Jesus both belonged AND told the story)—imagining ourselves as the ‘faithful’--exposes us as well. We are burned by our own judgment and our own demands that our personal righteousness be taken into account (that there is a price to be paid and, where appropriate, merit awarded)! Our attitude is checked by the father’s gently chiding words, “Quit your fussing: all is yours. Rejoice with me.”

The real challenge is to see ourselves in both sons on either count. And to find ourselves in the loving action of the Father, for whom being in relationship meant more than correctness: because grace doesn’t play by the rules.

Contributor: Donna

A Reflection on Psalm 53, particularly verse 1a.

“Fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.”

I wonder sometimes what it would be like to really believe that there is no God. Having grown up as the daughter of pastors/missionaries and having attended a church-sponsored boarding school, “God” was the air I breathed. The notion of “God” determined what to wear, what to eat, where to go, who to be with, how to act. We prayed our morning devotions, with three meals a day, with nightly scripture reading. We attended church at least three times a week. The thought of “God” determined where we lived, the kind of money we made, the commitments we made. “God” determined how generous we were and with whom through our tithes and offerings.

And I’m grateful for that upbringing. But as I grew up, I realized that many of the folks who claimed knowledge and relationship with “God” meant something far different from me when it came to God. Their certainty seemed to point to a logic grounded in a singular viewpoint: theirs. Their belief in God prevented them from entertaining other viewpoints—whether religious or secular. It narrowed their field of vision, kept them on a straight and narrow path, and precluded many possibilities in their lives. Then I realized: I’d been guilty of it myself.

“God” evades representation, apprehension or comprehension especially in the sense of grasping or fully understanding something. God is not simply an object in the world to be known. We learn of God in scripture, but acknowledge that scripture merely points us to Something

beyond itself. God may be contained in Scripture, but not contained by Scripture. And frankly, to put limits or parameters on the Divine is to elevate ourselves to a Godlike position—we hold the keys to the kingdom. We become God, and by virtue of our own ego, declare in our hearts that there is nothing larger than our perceptions. We become fools, because in our hearts, we think we are God.

As people of God we should understand that we will never have a corner on the market of “God”. We can only approximate the Divine. God will always be beyond our grasp or some conjured system of thought. For me as a theologian to do theology otherwise is to declare somehow in my heart that there is no God other than one I can describe. It is hubris at its worst. It is foolish.

The challenge is to remain theologically modest: to not claim to know more than we do, and at the same time, acknowledge a God that gives Godself to us fully. God is simply more than we can take or imagine.

Tuesday, March 29, 2022:

[Psalm 53; Leviticus 25:1-19; Revelation 19:9-10](#)

Contributor: Donna

A reflection on Leviticus 25:1-19

We all dread that swirling rainbow icon on the screen: that moment when we have been busy, working on the computer with deadlines looming and hit a snag: there isn't enough bandwidth or enough RAM in the computer and everything hangs, suspended in the balance. The computer is no longer responsive. We have to wait it out or restart to get it sorted.

The reading in Leviticus reminds us that God requires from us rest from our labor, our worry, our crushing obligations. Moreover, God requires a break from us from our legalism, our tendency to keep score, our moral and ethical tallies... "forgive us our debtors... our trespassers." We are to periodically pause and forget: forget who owes us what; forget who hurt us. We are to let go of it all. Whether it is the crushing anxiety of being a perpetual casualty of the system, or ferocious privilege blocking all empathy—we are to perform, in modern terms, a factory reset from whatever it is that renders us unresponsive to the Spirit. And as we see in scripture, God provides mechanisms for such forgetfulness. Relief. Rest.

The word 'forgetfulness' is used advisedly: we are not to merely pause our collection efforts upon those indebted to us, picking them back up when the circumstances warrant. God's demand upon us is to erase all trace of these caustic transactions and start fresh. Value is now understood in relationship instead of negotiation or contract, both in how we understand others *and* ourselves.

The language in Leviticus is interesting, "Observe a sabbath for the Lord" (Lev. 25:2). It appears that we are not the only beneficiaries of this sabbath rest: it is 'for' God. The notion of God taking a break—a much needed sabbatical—amused me. We assume that the sabbath laws are object lessons—things *God* is teaching *us* about patience, rest, waiting, and renewal. The notion of an infinite God (beyond our measure) precludes any idea that God needs space and time to regenerate—to rest. Does God expend energy? Is God tired or depleted?

At the risk of anthropomorphizing, could it not be simply this? God needs us to lay down all the burdens and obligations that preoccupy us (no matter what end of the economic or social scale on which we find ourselves) and inform our vision. God needs us to reset in order to be responsive once again to God's leadings.

The challenge to the church is this: how can we move beyond the binaries of 'owing' and 'being owed'? What practices can we put in place that will remind us that relationship supersedes obligations, and that responsiveness, both to one another and to God, will bring jubilation?

Contributor: Donna

A reflection on 2 Kings 4:1-7 and Luke 9:10-17

An economy of abundance

Fear enters our lives largely because of the notion of scarcity and finitude. We fear our resources might be at an end—whether health, wealth, family, or friends. We fear not having enough or being enough.

Some have grown accustomed to perpetual poverty: poverty of spirit (depression); relational impoverishment (loneliness or abuse); economic poverty (being poor); spiritual impoverishment (never finding peace/rest). It is exhausting living in the uncertainty of the future (Where will my next meal come from? How will I pay the bills? Will he/she still love me? What if God rejects me?)

Others experience scarcity from the other end: hoarding their riches out of fear of potential loss (I like my life how it is, and I don't want it to change. This is too good to be trusted! What if something catastrophic happens and I've diminished my store? How will I manage the future?).

The narratives in today's scripture readings from 2 Kings and Luke demonstrate a different mindset. In each, a situation arises where needs are potentially unmet. In both, a simple act of faith seems to produce miraculous results: the pitfalls of finitude and scarcity are overturned by an economy of abundance. The resources on hand prove to be sufficient when the community is gathered as a witness, and God is recognized.

In both cases, the need was acknowledged. When the woman was about to lose her house and she faced the terror of homelessness and enslavement, she was seen and someone intervened. Secondly, the resources at hand (however meager they seem) were recognized and employed to create what seemed by all accounts to be a miracle. Instead of writing her off, they found riches in her.

Likewise, we read in Luke that when the disciples wanted to turn the hungry crowd away, Jesus saw the potential in the scant store, took it, and instead of ridiculing or belittling or bemoaning it, used it to feed a multitude.

Might the challenge be this? How does the church community identify and assist those at risk (both within the faith community and in the world it serves)? Can we locate within those in need or within the faith community itself the very resources which could solve the anxiety of debt and the threat of hunger and homelessness? Can we release our own scarcity-based fear and allow ourselves to hold our proverbial 'fishes and loaves' with an open hand instead of a tight fist? Can we risk the vulnerability of allowing our own meager stores (emotional, physical, economic) to be the source of abundance for all?

Do you ever wonder what became of the twelve baskets of broken pieces left over from the feast (Luke 9:17)? They are still feeding folks today.

Contributor: Donna

A reflection on Isaiah 43:1-7

The promise of God to Israel, in this passage, is not a promise of an easy life, lacking conflict or strife. Instead, it is a promise of hope in spite of troubles and trials. It is a promise that in the worst that life can throw at Israel (vs. 2), she is not abandoned. It is a promise of intimacy—God calls her by name and claims her as God’s own (vs. 1). It is a promise that she will be gathered in and not lack community (vs.5).

According to the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, 80,384 Chicagoans were homeless in 2016. Chicago Public Schools identified 18,117 homeless students during the 2016-2017 school year. I lived most of the last two decades in this city.

Chicago, as most large metropolitan cities, is a gathering place for the gay community. Entire neighborhoods market themselves as welcoming and affirming of GLBTQI+ folks, proudly displaying rainbow flags. There are book stores, hospitals, grocers, and restaurants who cater to the queer population. There are gay friendly apartment buildings, hair salons and bars. You can walk down the street and see people of all persuasions holding hands, or clutched in an amorous embrace. It isn’t a ‘spectacle’ in these neighborhoods: it is simply life playing out in ordinary ways. Places like Boystown and Lakeview and Andersonville are a Mecca of sorts—and the GLBTQI+ crowd is drawn to these havens of safety and rest. I have many friends who fled rural midwest to come to Chicago, largely because they could escape the spotlight of the small town and blend into such neighborhoods seamlessly—their orientation no longer a threat to anyone, they could go about their queer lives without hassle and harassment. They can be anonymous. In many ways it is an ark of safety.

One of my dearest friends, Greg, worked for a not-for-profit called The Night Ministries. Stories Greg told confirmed this gay-migration to the city, but opened my eyes to the less-than-stellar experiences of Chicago’s GLBTQI+ kids. They come from all over the Midwest, many runaways from Christian homes who refused to accept them for who they were or simply kicked them out because of their orientation. The Night Ministry runs a bus that offers medical assistance, and helps them find an age-appropriate shelter to keep them off the streets and away from the usual perils of homelessness: weather extremes, poverty, drugs, gangs, prostitution. It bears repeating: it isn’t just a place that these kids can go to for help—the bus comes to them. It seeks them out.

Greg was involved in getting hundreds of kids each night a safe space to sleep, healthcare, food and other services. He was also an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church.

When I read Isaiah 43:1-7, I cannot help but imagine God speaking to those kids: I created you. I will call you by your name—I know you. You are my child. No matter what you go through, I will be with you. I will gather a community for you—you are no longer alone. I will gather in my sons and daughters. All of us need to hear these words and experience their promise: but some need it more than others.

The challenge for the people of God is to uphold these same promises to those who, like Israel, have been displaced. How can the church not only welcome GLBTQI+ folks in, but more importantly, go and seek them out where they live? How can we get to know them intimately—their needs, their stories, their names? When will we as a church gladly claim them as our own? When will we gather them in community—so that they are no longer alone? When will we proudly acknowledge that they are our sons and daughters?

Friday, April 1, 2022:

[Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:8-15; Philippians 2:25-3:1](#)

Contributor: Donna

A reflection on Isaiah 43:8-10

Isaiah tends to slip into the text some paradoxical statements that are effective rhetorical devices (for example. Isaiah 55 opens with the statement that those who are without money should buy things. Huh.) In today's text, the phrases "blind who have eyes" and "deaf who have ears" stop the reader in her tracks. This isn't a question of physical disability: the prophet's comments are directed towards the folks who by all accounts should be able to see and hear—their natural faculties were intact. But something seems to be preventing that from happening.

In verse 10, the Lord declares that it is those who have eyes but are blind, and ears but can't hear who are nevertheless God's witnesses—the servants God has chosen. Moreover, God chose them in order that they might gain knowledge of God and believe. God expected growth.

I think about this portion of scripture a lot, particularly when I look around at the people with whom I attended or taught in seminary (myself included). We were a motley crew—certainly many came bright (but not all); certainly many came fit for ministry (but not all); certainly many came as models of good relationships (but not all). Each brought with them experiences and baggage which would both help and hinder their ability to learn and grow. Yet, here we were answering some sort of Divine call upon our lives to be witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus.

We would somehow expect God to be more judicious when choosing witnesses to the Divine Truth. But it seems there is little discrimination to the love that draws us towards God and bears witness in us via the Spirit. Except, perhaps, that sneaky phrase in verse 10: "You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He." There is no expectation of having arrived at perfect understanding or knowledge. Just an expectation of continued growth catalyzed by bearing witness to the love of God.

Of course, denominations and accreditors lay expectations upon students for the conferral of credentials and degrees. But these are markers of the bare minimum of learning required to begin work: they are not the culmination of a lifetime of ministry. The expectation of each graduate or ordinand is life-long learning in response to the Spirit.

What is the challenge then in this text? Perhaps it is to acknowledge that we will never fully arrive, but that the God who calls us and draws us in knows our weakness (when we can't see or hear fully) and anticipates our growth. Perhaps it is the acknowledgment that bearing witness doesn't leave us as an untouched, objective observer, but moves us towards knowledge and belief. We grow in Christ.

Contributor: Donna

A reflection on John 11: 45-57

The church's tendency to emphasize the divinity of Jesus often makes us downplay the very human moments that scripture won't let us forget. Today's reading does just that. The temptation to simply say Jesus avoided the crowds because "he knew he had a bigger purpose and it wasn't his time to die yet" is real. But what if we pause and allow Jesus to be the fully human person we claim him to be? The one that isn't prescient? How does this story read then?

If the humanity of Jesus is taken seriously, we see a man who is suffering the consequences of the life he leads: that is, Jesus is a man who, by publicly critiquing the system, now bears its wrath; a man who, by living out who he is (being true to himself), finds himself not believed and moreover, threatening to the status quo. His opposition worried his shenanigans (the signs and wonders he worked) would bring down the nation (vs. 48).

We can identify with the man who avoided the crowds because of the threat of violence against himself and those close to him. THIS is a man we can identify with.

So much of faith valorizes self-sacrifice and bravery—all of which have a time and place. But here we see Jesus enacting self-preservation, both for himself and his followers. Here we see Jesus step away from what threatens him and find sanctuary in the most unlikely of places—the borderlands.

I think the GLBTQI+ community can identify with this Jesus. I think there are times when retreat is appropriate and self-preservation a necessity. It might mean creating communities for yourself which are safe. It might mean staying 'closeted' for a while until the time feels right. It might mean taking time to retreat and pray and prepare yourself for the battles ahead. What it certainly means is trusting yourself to know when to pick your battles and when to play it safe. And it certainly doesn't mean self-preservation is a failure of faith.

As always, the challenge for the church is to allow folks to figure things out in their own time and space. It is a challenge to stop finding difference threatening and to trust the Spirit to lead. It might mean making safe spaces in the most unlikely places—at the borders where the church may or may not have authority.

Contributor: Giacomo Liggera

Isaiah 43:16-21

How interesting is this! “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.” What past is there before our Lord? Has our world changed? More war has broken out after Jesus’s death than maybe any other death in history. Isn’t that the tragedy and irony of his life? A sacrifice to absolve humanity of sin, and yet one can say it in fact “drew out the chariots and horses, the army and the reinforcements together.” That is humanity at its finest. You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink it. For those who act falsely and abuse their faith, acting in violence and hate, will face judgment for their betrayal to Christ.

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

What ego! And, hilariously, so open about it: “If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.” That can so easily capture the mindset of some Christians. The idea is that because they have faith in Christ they are superior to others. And commonly; because they have faith in some interpretation of the Bible and Christ they are superior. I have found that those who have the strongest egos are sometimes the most delicate.

There is something to be said for having a quiet assurance in your own faith and respectfulness for others. If you are truly confident, you respect your neighbor- including their beliefs. There comes a time for speaking about your faith when asked.

God has blessed us with so many beautiful plants, animals, and people. Do not discard them as garbage. God has placed this “garbage” on the world for a reason, and it is part of our duty to appreciate it: for it is a blessing in itself.

John 12:1-8 Jesus Anointed at Bethany

It is interesting to hear Jesus talk here. The image we have of Jesus is one who places himself before others- after all, didn’t he sacrifice himself to save humanity? And yet, here is Jesus seemingly taking pleasure in the little things. He even rebukes Judas’ point about the perfume being worth a year’s wages to the poor. Yes, the Bible makes very clear that Judas was not exactly the paragon of goodwill. However, he has a very valid point. Here is a Jesus who is indulging in luxury and ego. Is that fair? Jesus knows he is approaching his death and is doing so willingly. He also knows that his death is world-changing and the most important events in history. When we know and are expecting death, is it so selfish to be selfish? Or are there limits? A good thing to consider when reading this passage is your own beliefs on Jesus’s perspective towards Martha’s sacrifice. Is it valid for him to take advantage of wealth and glitz considering his status or is important for us, even when nearing death, to take in consideration those around us.

The April 2 devotional continues on the next page

Contributor: Karter Diamond Santana

Focus on faith. When you pray you're supposed to trust in our father; our Lord.

So why do we worry so much? We do it because we are not in control of the unknown. When we focus on what lies ahead and trust in him, our past stays behind us. God will always provide and we must be patient for his blessings.

Some blessings we originally think are for us—he sees better so he will take certain options and things out of our path so he can guide our feet while we run this race. When we are in darkness it is so easy to forget what light looks like. We must remember that the Lord restores our fortune. It won't always rain. He will make a way out of no way.

A couple months ago I had one of the worst depressive episodes. The devil tricked me into thinking that I wasn't worthy of life, happiness, and success. I crawled desperately out of that dark place. I fought to talk to God more. I put all my faith in him and tried my best to be patient.

Today I am on my way to having my own apartment. I move out of the shelter next week. In addition, I accepted a full time job offer with a not for profit organization that I am passionate about. Something that I have never had before. I haven't been in need. I've been blessed in tenfold with food, clothes, and mental stability. He has helped me fall in love with me and practice self care more consistently. I thought that I was hopeless but I am so hopeful now.

Pray with me:

Father I am so grateful to have you in my life Please forgive me for not trusting you sooner.

Forgive me for trying to destroy your creation. I put all my faith in you. Have mercy on me Lord. I ask that you bless those who are less fortunate and who need help getting out of the dark. Amen.

Holy spirit lifted through the following scriptures:

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:4-14

John 12:1-8

Monday, April 4, 2022:

[Psalm 20; Exodus 40:1-15; Hebrews 10:19-25](#)

Contributor: Karter Diamond Santana

Holy spirit lifted through the following scriptures:

Psalm 20

Exodus 40:1-15

Hebrews 10:19-25

A sincere heart and full assurance that faith brings will allow us to get closer access to God.

He is a faithful God. We must not let our hope waver.

Furthermore we must not continue to forget about our neighbors. We need to encourage one another because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. We must set up our lives and homes as if we are setting up the tabernacle.

In Exodus 40, the Lord gave Moses in depth instructions on how the tabernacle was expected to be set up.

Keep your life in compliance.

Allow it to be anointed with God's word.

Remain cleanly.

Bring forth your best to the table that he provides.

When you don't keep your house in order, chaos isn't far behind. You get derailed from your track. We get distracted from our goals due to the mess we allowed to enter our lives by not cleaning up consistently.

To keep chaos at bay we must follow God's word obediently.

Task:

Before you go to sleep at night lay out instructions for yourself on how you want your following day to go to maximize productivity.

Then when you have more time expand your instructions to a week, and then eventually a month.

The devil loves to play with our minds and disturb our peace when we are being unproductive and are idle. We must be more equipped with armor to fight back.

The April 3 devotional continues on the next page

Monday, April 4, 2022:

[Psalm 20; Exodus 40:1-15; Hebrews 10:19-25](#)

Contributor: Giacomo Liggera

There is power in things physical as there is a blessed energy in all things.

How can all things on the Earth not be blessed when they are created by something divine? We must have a respect for the power held in objects in their purest form, such as pure water, the anointing oil, and the anointing ark. It is out of our respect and belief that such things express their blessed power and show their effectiveness on our lives.

Such is shown by communion: it is our belief in bread as body and wine as blood which makes the symbology of communion powerful. We must remember the blessed power in all things created by the divine as we worship.

Such is the power of Exodus 40:1-15, as the Lord recognizes the holiness of physical objects to the Heavenly Father.

It is not only through Aaron and his sons' beliefs that makes them worthy enough to stand as authorities. Such places Holy, but that does not mean we can only reach the divine in places deemed Holy by others. Simply a place you feel at peace or a greater connection with the divine is holy.

It can be your bedroom, a quiet place you go hiking, or even a well worn path you go hiking.

All of these places can be deemed Holy if they ripen your connection. Even a coffee shop can be Holy if it helps you appreciate the world and the Blessings in it!

Blessed be to all that is divine in this world!

Contributor: Giacomo Liggera

Psalm 20; Judges 9:7-15

The natural world all around us holds special meaning, unique to itself. Just as we hold some man-made things as Holy are natural things, perhaps even more so. After all, what is closer to the Divine than something natural, in its purest form and uncorrupted.

Everything around us has its uses and purposes. You can see that in the effects of things such as lavender, which soothes the mind, and motherwort, which provokes the incredible gift of dream. Natural things hold purpose, and we should honor their meaning.

This passage recognizes the power of living, natural things. It also recognizes their fickle nature. As natural things hold their own purpose, using them for things against their nature is useless.

After all, would we drink chamomile before a football game? Maybe only if our nerves were getting to us, and we needed to calm down. It certainly would not rev us up! As we have our purpose, so do natural things.

1 John 2:18-28

I simply hope that we have reached the point in our society where we realize that Christianity is evolving and what is in the Bible has been influenced by man.

Love thy neighbor. Even if they hold beliefs other than yours, love thy neighbor.

As we can learn so much from the differences of those around us, love our neighbors even more and respect them.

No person is the “antichrist” simply because the beliefs they hold are different from yours. It is important now more than ever, where we see the world so divided, to treat each other with love and respect. Blessed be.

Wednesday, April 6, 2022:

[Psalm 20; Habakkuk 3:2-15; Luke 18:31-34](#)

Contributor: Liggera Edmonds-Allen

Luke 18:31-34 (NIV) Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

I will admit it - I am a theatre kid at heart. When reading these passages, and especially the Gospel of Luke, I must remind myself that they were intended to be read aloud to followers of Jesus, who came together to share the Lord’s supper. Indeed, I find it particularly amusing that the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles come together to make the Luke-Acts, which I imagine as a play on the side of a bustling street, full of performers in simple garb who invite us to listen - at least, for a little while.

As that theatre kid, I cannot divorce myself from the emotional stakes of this passage, or the dramatic irony. We know what’s coming. The disciples do not. In fact, the disciples are thinking about other things. Some interpretations have them in awe of their own importance, dreaming of their great ministry and ever-lasting legacy. I imagine them, in this moment, stuck on that one key phrase: ‘they will flog and kill him.’

Perhaps they did not consider the ‘who’ that will be doing the ‘delivering.’ Perhaps not the mocking and insulting, which they’ve had a little taste of. Perhaps not even the vicious flogging. I imagine them frozen in the words hanging in the air - that they will kill him. Perhaps they were in such confusion, denial, and fear that they didn’t hear the next part: that he will rise again...

I say all of this in order to consider the word ‘hidden.’ The disciples could not understand, because the meaning ‘...was hidden from them.’ Hidden? By who? Were they allergic to clarifying questions? Was someone leaning on a button and censoring the words? Did God reach down and place hands over their ears?

It is not that the disciples didn’t literally understand the language Jesus was speaking. It was that they couldn’t understand the meaning. It was ‘hidden’ from them. My answer as to who was ‘hiding’ the meaning was the disciples themselves. How can you comprehend your salvation looking you in the eye and telling you of his destruction? If he is truly the man of God, how can he die?

In my great production of the Luke-Acts, Jesus does not try to explain. He does not rush to comfort them, or rephrase the sentiment. He does not grab their ears and speak louder. In my mind, he smiles, maybe a little sadly. The disciples can ever understand this responsibility. The meaning must be hidden from them: otherwise, we’re in a different story.

I’ve been thinking a lot about that roadside play. I’ve been thinking about the person who reads this aloud as they host the Lord’s supper. I have been thinking about the things I cannot understand - the meanings that are ‘hidden’ to me.

There’s a lot I do not - or cannot - understand, right now. The question of the disciples rings in my ears, centuries apart - but, Jesus, how could someone be so cruel?

These meanings are hidden from me, but my responsibility is not. The words I can understand are the words of Christ. These are the words that say, forgive, and be forgiven, weep, and you shall be comforted, rejoice, and we let us rejoice with you.

These are the words that say, persist. On the third day, he will rise again.

Thursday, April 7, 2022:

[Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 53:10-12; Hebrews 2:1-9](#)

Contributor: Monica

A meditation on Psalm 31: 9-16

“I am in distress” (Psalm 31:9 NIV).

This reminds me of a prayer we are all familiar with. The one we say only when we are at our lowest, when our “life is consumed by anguish” (Psalm 31:10 NIV). I’ve been here several times before, as I’m sure a lot of us have. And I am here again.

When I believed in God, I prayed to Him. It was comforting to be able to give up all that scared me and to put faith in an all-knowing God – a force I knew was watching over me, protecting me. I felt invincible, even if I was afraid. And that’s what kept me moving forward. Faith.

But, as I grew older, my beliefs changed. I don’t believe in God and haven’t for a very long time. And sometimes I wish I did.

I just received some frightening news from a family member and have been tumbling through emotions. I’m finding myself in a situation that is beyond anyone’s control and there is so much fear and uncertainty around it. I have this urge to kneel and pray, “My times are in your hands” (Psalm 31:15 NIV).

I’m wanting to collect what weighs me down and hand it up to someone else. But, because my beliefs have transformed and God isn’t outside of me anymore, I find that I am reaching up to no one. It is moments like this that make me wish I believed in something, anything – to collect my burdens and protect me, “I trust in you Lord” (Psalm 31:14 NIV).

But, right now, I have only myself to trust, and I often feel alone because of it. There is no outside force guiding me, just my own uncertain hand drawing lines to nowhere. And it seems like everything is out of my control. Well, because it is. God or no God, control is an illusion.

The act of giving our burdens to God is an act of letting go of control. Letting go is an act that is terribly difficult to achieve.

So, today I encourage you to join me in practicing the art of letting go. It is something we have to actively choose to do every single day.

Friday, April 8, 2022:

[Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 54:9-10; Hebrews 2:10-18](#)

Contributor: Monica

Another meditation on Psalm 31: 9-16

I'm particularly latched onto these verses because it's so relatable. It's like I can feel the desperation coming out of David's lips as he recites this prayer. So, I hope you don't mind that I speak on it again.

I mentioned before that I don't believe in God. But, I want to elaborate. I don't believe in God the way that I used to.

My view of God has evolved many times before. When I was a child, God was a large man with a booming voice sitting above the cloud, waiting to bring me to Heaven's gates when I was ready. When I was in college, God was completely nonexistent. There was no heaven, no hell, just darkness. Now, God is you, God is me.

I've been trying this thing now where anytime I'm referring to God, reading about God or praying to God, I'm imagining this God exists inside of me. It's not a power outside of me, not a man holding my puppet strings, rather, a power I've always had inside of me.

We all have power within us; sometimes it's harder to find because we've built too many layers of walls around it. Maybe we're too afraid of the responsibility that comes with this power. It's much easier to defer that responsibility elsewhere.

But, today, I encourage you to look for your power, maybe even use some of it today. David sings of God being his "rock" and his "fortress." What would it look like to be a "rock" or a "fortress" for yourself?

Saturday, April 9, 2022:

[Psalm 31:9-16; Leviticus 23:1-8; Luke 22:1-13](#)

Contributor: Monica

A meditation on Luke 22: 1-13

Just as much as God is in us, so is Satan. When I was a child, Satan was a red horned devil who bounced from person to person, possessing them, corrupting them. Now, Satan is just another word for fear.

In Luke 22, Jesus and his disciples are preparing for Passover, but Judas had other plans. He was going to betray Jesus, “Satan entered Judas” (Luke 22: 3 NIV).

The phrasing is interesting because it makes it seem like the responsibility is taken off of Judas’s shoulders. It wasn’t him who betrayed Jesus, it was Satan, and Judas was simply a helpless vessel. But, if I believe that God is a power in me, then I must also believe that Satan is a power within me as well. The two are always at war. Some days it feels like God is winning, and other days, it feels like Satan is.

Who decides the winner is me.

I am not perfect, nobody is. And sometimes Satan’s power is more tempting than God’s. I would be lying if I said I never wielded Satan’s power. When I’m tired or vulnerable, Satan’s power seems more easily and readily accessible. I imagine that’s why many people act on fear – because it’s so easy to.

It is okay to be afraid.

But today, I encourage you to wield God’s power despite your fear.

It’s like what Mark Twain once said, “Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear.”

What steps can you take to be courageous today?

Contributor: Daniel Kihara

I remember when I was growing up, I was usually the one sent by my mother to collect palm leaves, they were very rare to find in our village but I had to get them.

It was a lovely adventure and I loved doing it, but I didn't understand the meaning of Palm Sunday.

Now as I write this reflection, I am so humbled by the love of Christ, and for sure I have witnessed the love of Christ in my life. I am always thankful to the Lord because I know His love is eternal.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, I know you love me but sometimes I forget the sacrifice you made to prove your love to me.

I ask for strength of faith, help me to believe even when things are hard.

Help me to make time for you and to thank you every day all the days of my life.

Amen.

Contributor: Rev. Marian Edmonds-Allen

Today is Palm Sunday! And as all four Gospels report, today is the day that Jesus arrives Jerusalem for the last time of his earthly life.

Twice before he had entered the city after telling his disciples to keep his identity quiet. But this time, Jesus knew he was about to die, and instead of his usual way of entering the city, he wanted the pomp and ceremony.

He wanted the crowds cheering him and putting their precious cloaks on the ground for him to walk on. But did he come down the mountain on a chariot? Or on the shoulders of his disciples, as a conquering hero? No. The day before he asked for a young donkey, a colt, an animal some translators call an "ass." The gospel writers spend a lot of time describing how Jesus prepares for today - Jesus planned this street theater carefully, with subversive touches to lampoon the expectations of the world.

He entered like a King - in a procession with cheers - but on an ass. The Roman soldiers expected attack - but this type of procession was known by all - riding in to a city on a donkey - as signifying peaceful intentions, not war. And Jesus begins his journey from the Mount of Olives, where it was expected that the final battle for Jerusalem's liberation would begin.

But Jesus lampoons these expectations, too. He rides in to exultation, shouts of praise and honor - on a young donkey, and some speculate his feet may have dragged on the ground on such a small animal. Jesus arrives in such a way as to surprise everyone, like a street carnival, like a drag show.

Jesus was engaging in political theater for the people then, and for us, now. Jesus leaned in to the scandal of it all, and Christianity continues to be a scandalous religion, a uniquely queer religion, to quote my friend the priest and author of Queer Virtue, Liz Edman.

Christianity, like Jesus, is always unexpected if you look closely.

We have heard this story so many times that we don't even think about how unexpected this is - a young donkey, an ass, when you are a King? As Alanis Morissette would say, isn't it ironic, don't you think?

Jesus the Messiah, the King, rides into Jerusalem in glory - but on a young donkey, and on his way to be forsaken by his followers, and to die a death reserved to humiliate the damned. Isn't it ironic, don't you think? This unexpected Jesus has a lesson for all of us in this story, and especially for those of us who are LGBT. Like Jesus, we have dignity within indignity.

And the irony is that, like Jesus, it is our presence which is salvific. It is OUR presence, us, so beloved by Jesus, which saves the world in ways no one ever imagined, or expected. We - all of us, you, me, your LGBT friends on earth, those who have come before us, those who come after us - it is us who are blessed to be blessings.

We are the ones the God of many names has called for the journey down the mountain in drag, on our way to be celebrated one day, reviled the next, yet always, always, bearing dignity within indignity. Why? Because we have been chosen. We were born for this mission, like Jesus. We were created with special talents, unique ways of seeing each other and the world around us. Deep compassion, deep love, deep joy - just like Jesus.

Our weeks are always Holy Weeks. Full of drama. And we know how it ends. One day it ends with death, and yet...it ends with life. And a life that shines forever in a world that desperately needs our rainbow light to illuminate it, to instruct it, to love it. And you, my friends, are blessed to be the blessing of Jesus right here, right now, today and every day. YOU are the one Jesus has chosen to share his message of unexpected love and light.

The unexpected love and light that the world cannot extinguish, love and light the world desperately needs. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Contributor: Daniel Kihara

“The Lord says, “Here is my servant, whom I strengthen—the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with my Spirit, and he will bring justice to every nation” (Isaiah 42:1 GNB).

As I reflect on this, I can see how the world is full of injustices, we have two categories of people - i.e., the haves and the have nots. The poor are oppressed. Corruption is all over the land, and our leaders are so selfish.

We have hope because God has remembered His people and we shall be set free.

“How precious, O God, is your constant love! We find protection under the shadow of your wings” (Psalms 36:7 GNB). God will never let harm befall us.

“Since this is true how much more is accomplished by the blood of Christ!

Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice to God. His blood will purify our consciences from useless rituals, so that we may serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14 GNB).

I have always loved the Easter spirit.

It always reminds me of humbleness and obedience through which I got my salvation at the cross. I know sometimes I feel like the burden on my shoulder is heavy, but I always pray to God to give me the strength to follow Him and serve others and live to do His will. Amen

Holy Tuesday, April 12, 2022:

Isaiah 49:1-7, Psalm 71:1-14, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, John 12:20-36

Contributor: Daniel Kihara

“Israel's holy God and savior says to the one who is deeply despised, who is hated by the nations and is the servant of rulers: “Kings will see you released, and will rise to show their respect; princes also will see it, and they will bow low to honor you.”

This will happen because the Lord has chosen his servant; the holy God of Israel keeps his promises” (Isaiah 49:7 GNB).

There were times I wished nights to remain forever, it is a death sentence if people know you are queer in Kenya.

So, I lived in my hole until one day when I couldn't hide there anymore. I was deeply despised and hated by my family, friends and even workmates. That was the end of my career.

As I reflect on this passage, all I can read is the faithfulness of our God He delivers, restores and saves.

Today I can brag about the salvation of our Lord. Someone who was destined to die, and now I have hope and more so eternal life.

“Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servants will be with me where I am. And my father will honor anyone who serves me” (John 12:25-26).

Prayer:

Dear Lord, I embrace the cross, and I denounce this world.

Help me to follow you and serve you as I serve humanity.
Amen

Contributor: Sontaia Briggs

Preach to Yourself (Isaiah 50:4-9 NRSV)

We are doing the best we can. We call the name of God, ask the universe for forgiveness, and hope karma is not like whiplash. We listen to the words and voices of inspired leaders.

Essentially, we seek inspiration from outside ourselves. Intrinsicly we are drawn to an elevating message. Charismatic wordsmiths and preachers aren't just for the church types.

Do you sometimes imagine yourself as the bringer of the 'good news,' or upliftment? Do you sometimes find yourself replaying those profound messages in your mind while you search your life?

Isaiah 50:4 reminds us that, 'We can Preach to ourselves.'

The book of Isaiah displays the paradoxical nature of God. We are reminded in this text that God equips us to hear and listen to learn and teach. Also, we can be admonishers and disciplinarians. We vacillate between these roles in our faith lives.

We have a message within ourselves that will sustain us. Look no further than your reflection and your inspired heart for encouragement. There is a message within you, authored by you and for your nourishment.

God has given you the tongue of a preacher! You can inspire and comfort your fellow human beings.

You have sustenance.

You are able.

“Morning by morning he wakens my ear.” (Isaiah 50:4 NRSV)

We are reminded by this verse, that God's word isn't a one-time meal that God has provided for you. We are reminded that this is a spiritual superfood and self-replicating in your soul.

The mana is served daily by the holy spirit. All you have to do is look into the mirror, look into your own heart.

We seek encouragement from others, not realizing that we are prepared. What we offer others in need, we need as well. The first heart we must care for is our own this enables us to support others.

We can preach to ourselves!

Maundy Thursday, April 14 , 2022:

**Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14, Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19,
1 Corinthians 11:23-26, John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

Contributor: Nathaniel

Psalms 116: 1-19

“I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord” Psalm 116:17 (NRSV)

Being thankful should be easy. In the walls of the church, it should come freely. But what about when it doesn't?

What about when you'd be thought of as a what, not a who, if they knew the real you? What if your struggles would be seen as a consequence for simply waking up and being you? What if you'd be seen as a backslider, or worse a demonic influence, if you express thanks for blessings, because those blessings can't be from God if you're shhhhh.....gay.

So I answer the question...."What are you thankful for?"

With the same lame and practiced answer I've used for years. This time hoping it would come true like a wish. I'm thankful for a church family who loves me. I'm thankful for life. I'm thankful for.....but it's a wish.

After all, that family doesn't even know you behind the carefully constructed mask. They have closed themselves to the opportunity to know this life who God himself created.

What if?

What if you expressed the thanks? What if you expressed the blessings? What if you expressed your struggle? And what if that's the one thing that someone else in that room needed to hear to make it through their own battle? What if that declaration of victory through His power lifts someone? What if that someone is you and you needed to hear yourself declare it to make it real in your heart?

But what if it's not safe in the House of the Lord to express thanks to Him? God forbid! Have you done what you can to make that space safe? Have you invited peace and graciousness into the space? Have you invited others to do the same?

Many times we see thanksgiving as a currency to pay what we can back to our Savior. But what a privilege we have to be able to express those thanks!

Let us be mindful of our own willingness to express thanks and seek out opportunities for thanksgiving. But let us also think about and work toward opening the way for others to hear and give thanks themselves.

Response: Speak your thanksgiving aloud!

Contributor: Sontaia Briggs

The Power in Our Pain
Hebrews 5:7-9 ESV

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb 5:8)

How many of us learn from suffering?

Our carnal approach to suffering is to get free of it, to avoid it. The first lessons are the wrong lessons: how to be bad better, not get caught, and avoid it altogether.

How many times can you say you learned grace and humility from loss?

Have you ever learned patience, or the completion caused by life's pain?

Pain is a highway. It's unavoidable. Instead of avoiding it imagine if we embraced it, as what is in this moment.

Pain is God's green light to the next level. Passing through the pain means you were tested and survived. This scripture also implies that you have also ascended through your pain.

This scripture reminds us of the completion of God's sacrifice through the man Christ. Christ was righteous and experienced temptation. He was tempted, felt pain, loss, and suffered. We are given the example of this human man to interpret and navigate our human trials.

God is intentional and provides us a flesh example of suffering and ascension through Christ as a man.

When you feel you can't go on: consider the man that suffered provided us the knowledge that we can go on and get through.

Through a man, we see our redemption restored, Our salvific future secure. This is difficult to remember as we endure the travails of life, the promise through death.

Death is literal: a challenging situation ends, a relationship ends, a job ends. The end is real, as is the release provided by that ending and the cleared path to spiritual wholeness.

‘For Christ was made perfect in death.’ The source and example of salvation.

In a modern context: Hard moments and joyful moments of life come and end. We celebrate, we mourn this is our cycle. Birth, death, and revivification.

In your suffering be reminded and encouraged that the cycle inevitably ends, and renewal follows.

Contributor: Sontaia Briggs

Life is Long and Short (Job 14: 1-14)

The book of Job is considered the wisdom book in the bible and contemplates human suffering. That question is, why does a great omnipotent God allow us to suffer? What's the point? God can carve the world however God sees fit. We are reminded in this text, that time is no one's friend and how you spend it, is up to you.

Life is long and short, full of purpose and expectation we enter this world. We bloom, we seed, and we complete. The day of our exit is unknown.

Some of us experience health challenges and a crisis of the spirit. These incidents will indicate our ending clearer than others.

Ultimately, life is long and short.

The joys are so sweet! Discovery, opportunity, and growth feel like the sound of the ice cream truck in the summer. But we also know how fast the summer comes to an end. How short cool nights are in August.

The first cool splash of a pool fades eventually. Our humanness and our finite skin define us and make our short breaths so much sweeter.

The ticking clock makes life taste better.

Then there is the length of life, the pain, and death. The mundane endings without any of the drama. The cycle of death reminds us of purpose, we are indeed set with a purpose.

We are reminded that this struggle has a purpose. God has a purpose for us.

God isn't being cruel to only us the fragile humans; all living creature faces the clock. Some endings with more finesse than our own and some are crushed underfoot like an ant.

But before the end we lived, we planted, and we bloomed. Job 14:5 reminds us that our days are numbered.

What will you do with it?

Will you complain about the length of life given and the unfairness of life?

Will you take in each minute with the opportunity and potential it carries?

Consider that life is fair to all we all get a start and finish. The fairness: every story will end.

Don't waste your time living in comparisons and complaining about the length of a day.

Contributor: Liggera Edmonds-Allen

I have read this story many times. It was told to me by my mother.

When I heard this story as a child, it was like the rind of a ripe orange, unraveling in my mother's hand. There was the great stone door, which I imagined moving like the rumble of thunder. There was Mary, rushing to the disciples and weeping. There was the abandoned linen and cloth, the last scraps of comfort for the greatest teacher.

But I knew the ending. I knew the tough, bitter rind held a miracle within. I didn't have to weep with Mary - I anticipated her comfort, and the sweet balm of Jesus' words on her ears. I knew the triumph, and the singing, and the celebration that would come on Easter Sunday. I knew I would see my family and run in the yard, marveling at the sweet spring day and the meals that were prepared by loving hands.

Nowadays, I find myself sitting with the unnamed disciple. They outpaced Simon Peter, but did not go in. Did they fall to their knees and stare at the discarded linen, too anguished to stand and see any more? Did they look to Peter as the new authority, desperate for a shepherd in such despair? The best way for a character to represent the reader, I'd argue, is to leave them without a name...

It is said, later, that the other disciple finally entered, and 'saw and believed.' I think of the unnamed disciple, stubborn in their grief. I think of them disbelieving that the tomb could have been opened, Jesus' resting place desecrated by unknown hands. Selfishly, I imagine the unnamed disciple as denying that such a cruel action could occur - that someone could unwrap the linens and take the cloth from Jesus' head.

Did Peter and the disciple walk back in silence? Did the whole of eternity stretch between them? Did they weep together? Did they consider how to break the news to the other followers?

Nowadays, I sit beside the unnamed disciple. We stare at the linen on the ground, and are unable to imagine such cruelty. I would like to imagine myself as Mary, loyal to my post, honoring the lost life with suitable mourning. More realistically, I see myself grasping for comfort in authority, searching for someone to follow home, waiting for them to go to the tomb first. And then, the joy: the pounding of footsteps and the tears, the embrace and delivered words.

Although I sit with the unnamed disciple, away from the tomb, I must consider the form in which Jesus appeared to Mary. Mary mistakes him for the gardener who, in this context, would mind the tombs. Jesus is the gardener, tending every fragile bud, and watering every thirsty sprout. And, just as God did to Adam and Eve, Jesus sends Mary from the garden.

Just as the story of Adam and Eve, Mary is sent from the garden as a new beginning of humanity. Mary is sent away with a message, and with hope. It is with this action that Jesus seals the promise - the promise that all those who carry his message will be united without ending.

Mary comes to us - the unnamed, weeping disciples - in an arrival of celebration. Through her words, we are granted deliverance from the pain of mortality, and are unified in the mercy granted to us.

We are given the chance to rejoice: He is risen! He is risen, indeed!

Author:
Liggera Edmonds-Allen



Liggera Edmonds-Allen (they/them) is a Dramaturgy student at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Their work revolves around transgender activism and queer joy. They love poetry, theatre, and going to the aviary!

Author of:
March 2
Easter Sunday

Author:
Zaweria Hunyu



Zaweria Hunyu

Kenyan. African, Kenyan/kikuyu

Non-binary

Lesbian

Born again Christian

Business woman

Teacher

Author of:

March 3

March 4

March 5



Jimmy has lived and loved in the Washington, DC, area for 17 years but his hometown is Tucson, Arizona.

His day job is a pretty basic federal employee that aspires to be like Leslie Knope.

Otherwise, his days are spent enjoying people, food, tv/movies, music, languages, and teaching spin classes (come visit me at VIDA Fitness).

Author of:

March 3

March 4

March 5



“I grew up on a farm in rural Indiana. I went to Purdue University and then on to Regent University in Virginia Beach for law school. I started practicing law first for a small firm in Indianapolis and then eventually served 10 years in the Air Force.

The Air Force gave me the chance to live in several parts of the country, however, it was during that time that the conflict between my sexual orientation and faith became too much, so I thought I had to choose one or the other.

I walked away from a relationship with Jesus.

I made that decision in isolation without the benefit of the counsel of others.

In a way that only God could, that false dichotomy came to a resolution in October, 2013 when I firmly reconnected with God.

Author of:

March 6

March 7

March 8

March 9

March 19



My names are Nancy Wanja Mwangi.

I am from Kenya, and I love nature.

A single mother of two boys and a born-again Christian lesbian woman.

I am a human rights activist and I advocate for LGBTQ+

Author of:

March 6

March 7

March 8



Sontaia P. Briggs is the founder of YouUniversity, an online ministry uplifting and affirming the gifts of youth and young adults, as well as providing in-person college access/success coaching and counseling.

A consultant working with nonprofits and churches, Sontaia authors youth and young adult programs and workshops. She is a sought after LGBTQIA inclusion trainer and motivational speaker who has worked with PARITY NYC, Blanton-Peale Institute and Counseling Center, Park United Methodist Church and NMAC Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Sontaia holds a Master of Public Administration from Rutgers University and a Master of Arts in Youth Ministry from New York Theological Seminary.

Author of:

March 9

March 10

April 13

April 15

April 16



Aaron Jackson is thrilled to be here.

A native of Southern California, he has nonetheless lived in the nation's capital long enough to call himself a Washingtonian.

He is active in his Church's production team and his LGBT Bible study group.

An avid journaler, he is learning to embrace a Loving God for the mysterious, universal force that God is. Through his journaling, he is seeing that he is limited and seeks through practice to align it with the awesome, good and powerful reality that this mysterious God of Love has given to us.

Author of:

March 11

March 12



Rev. Kim Purl is an online minister at missouripastor.org who lives in rural Missouri and is ordained in the Church of the Nazarene.

Kim is one of the hosts at holydialogues.org, enjoying rich dialogue at the intersection of LGBTQI+ and faith.

As a mother of two teenagers and two young adults, she finds herself in natural conversation on social topics and faith over yummy Thai food.

Kim is married to her minister-husband, Joe, who helps her keep one foot on the ground.

Author of:

March 14

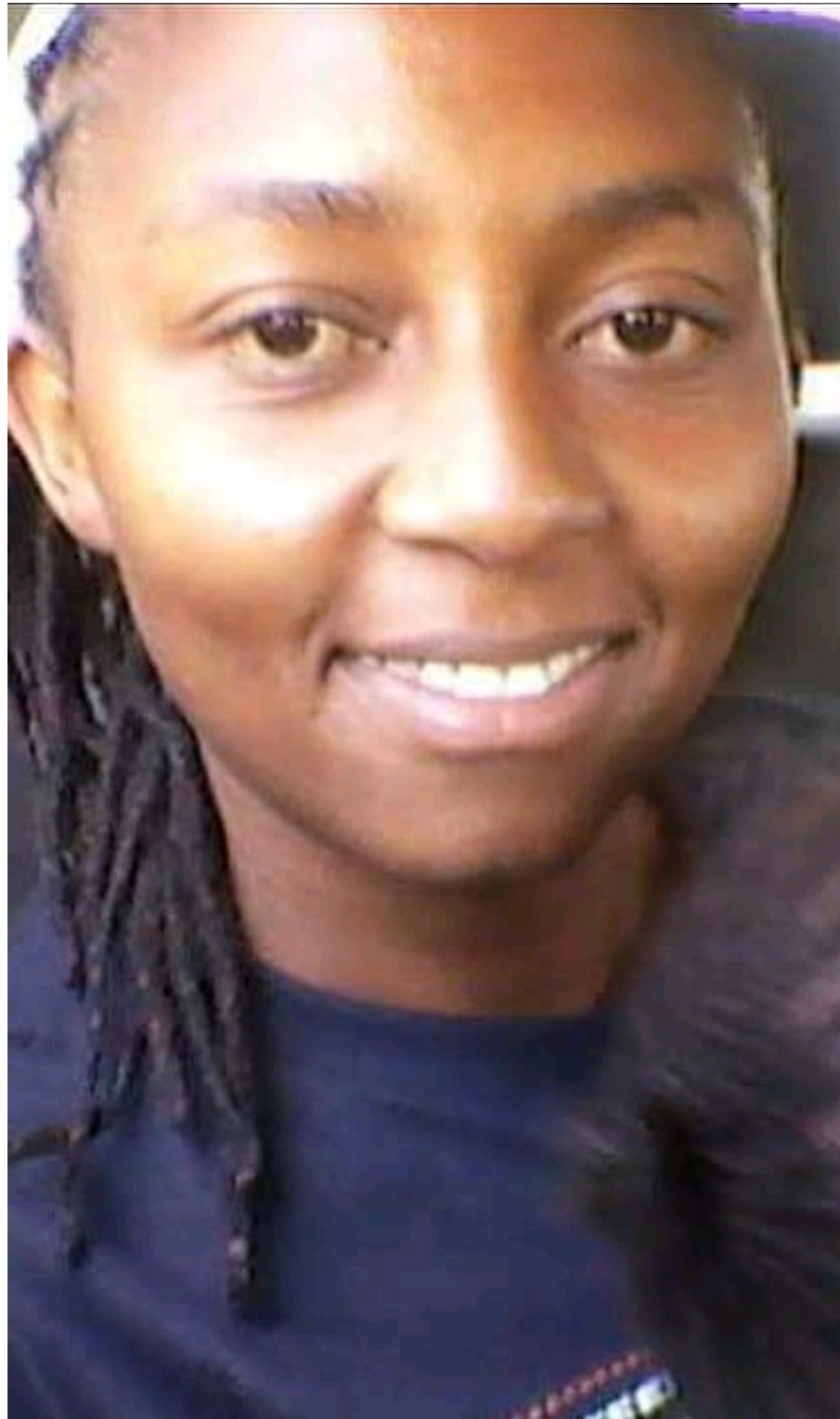
March 15

March 16

March 17

March 18

March 19



My name is Marie Nganga, and I am a Kenyan of African origin. I am 38 years old. I am a Christian lesbian woman. I love God with all my heart and I love serving God through humanity.

I have a passion for writing and studying the Bible.

I am a woman of faith and I look forward to the day when all of the LGBTQ+ community will feel safe at the Lord's table.

Author of:
March 20
March 21
March 24
March 25
March 26



Adrian Slonaker resides in downtown Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada in an apartment shared with a multicolored plush unicorn called Blaze.

Having completed university studies in linguistics and literature, Adrian works as a language consultant. In precious moments of free time, Adrian enjoys swimming, rock 'n roll records, naps during thunderstorms, horror films and extremely spicy vegetarian dishes.

Adrian's theological background and beliefs are somewhat eclectic and syncretic, with elements of Anabaptism (Mennonite), Anglicanism, Reform Judaism and Unitarian-Universalism in the mix.

Adrian also writes poetry, stories and essays and has been published extensively in journals and anthologies. In addition, Adrian is a fan of iced non-alcoholic beverages, especially if they are bright blue.

Author of:
March 20
March 21



My journey began in Ogden, Utah and I love hailing from the "rough" part of Utah.

I grew up a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day Saints (often referred to as the Mormons). At the age of 21, I left home to serve a proselyting mission for the church to southern Germany.

My faith foundation was shattered when, at age 40, I could no longer deny my orientation and gender identity. When I walked out of the closet, I also thought I was walking away from God.

I struggled reconciling my relationship with God and I am grateful He never gave up on me. I will always be grateful for the wonderful people at the United Church of Christ congregation I found during this time.

It was in that chapel I was reintroduced to God, who loved and accepted me, just as I was. My faith journey continues and I am so grateful for experiences, such as this, that allow me to rejoice in the word of God and worship Him.

Author of:

March 22

March 23



Hi, my name is Malique Guinn and I was born and raised in Lancaster, CA, where I am a member of Agape Community Church.

I am blessed to be a student in the Dramatic Writing Program at Carnegie Mellon University. In addition, I am a fiancée, a son, a brother, an uncle, and whoever else God says I am.

I gave my life to Christ towards the end of 2020 and I was baptized on July 11, 2021. Every day, I don't aspire for perfection, but to understand God's will for my life and serve others with love.

Author of:

March 24

March 25

March 26



I'm an ecclesial misfit: a daughter of Nazarene missionaries (Papua New Guinea), educated by United Methodists and Catholics, welcomed by American Baptists, and served as a Presbyterian pastor. I've studied and taught theology at the graduate level, ran an ethics center, worked in educational technology, and was an RN in ICUs in Illinois and Missouri.

My closest informants are Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian feminists.

My current iteration is as a library director in a rural public library and as a hobby farmer.

I understand my library district as my parish--only without all the religious trappings.

Author of:

March 27

March 28

March 29

March 30

March 31

April 1

April 2



I'm am a solitary Wiccan practitioner who believes in nature and humanity's interconnectedness.

I grew up in New York but currently live in Utah with my miniature Aussie named Bubba.

I am a graduate of Smith College and am a proud gender queer person and LGBTQ activist.

Author of:

April 3

April 4

April 5



Greetings!

My name is Karter Diamond Santana. When I was born my mom saw a Diamond.

My birth place is Brooklyn. I am a proud Christian transman. I am a college graduate and an ex felon.

My past is not my future. I give all honor to God. I aspire to inspire positive change.

Author of:

April 3

April 4



My name is Monica, my friends call me Mo. I was born and raised in Los Angeles and moved to D.C. about 3 years ago.

My journey with religion has evolved. I used to go to church as a kid, but it was never really forced onto me. It wasn't until I was in college when I was grappling with my sexual orientation that I started exploring different ways of thinking.

Author of:

April 7

April 8

April 9



My names are Daniel Kihara. 45 years old. Non- binary.

Born again Christian who is saved only by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am a small-scale farmer, and I live alone with my fur babies.

I believe in serving God through humanity.

Author of:

April 10

April 11

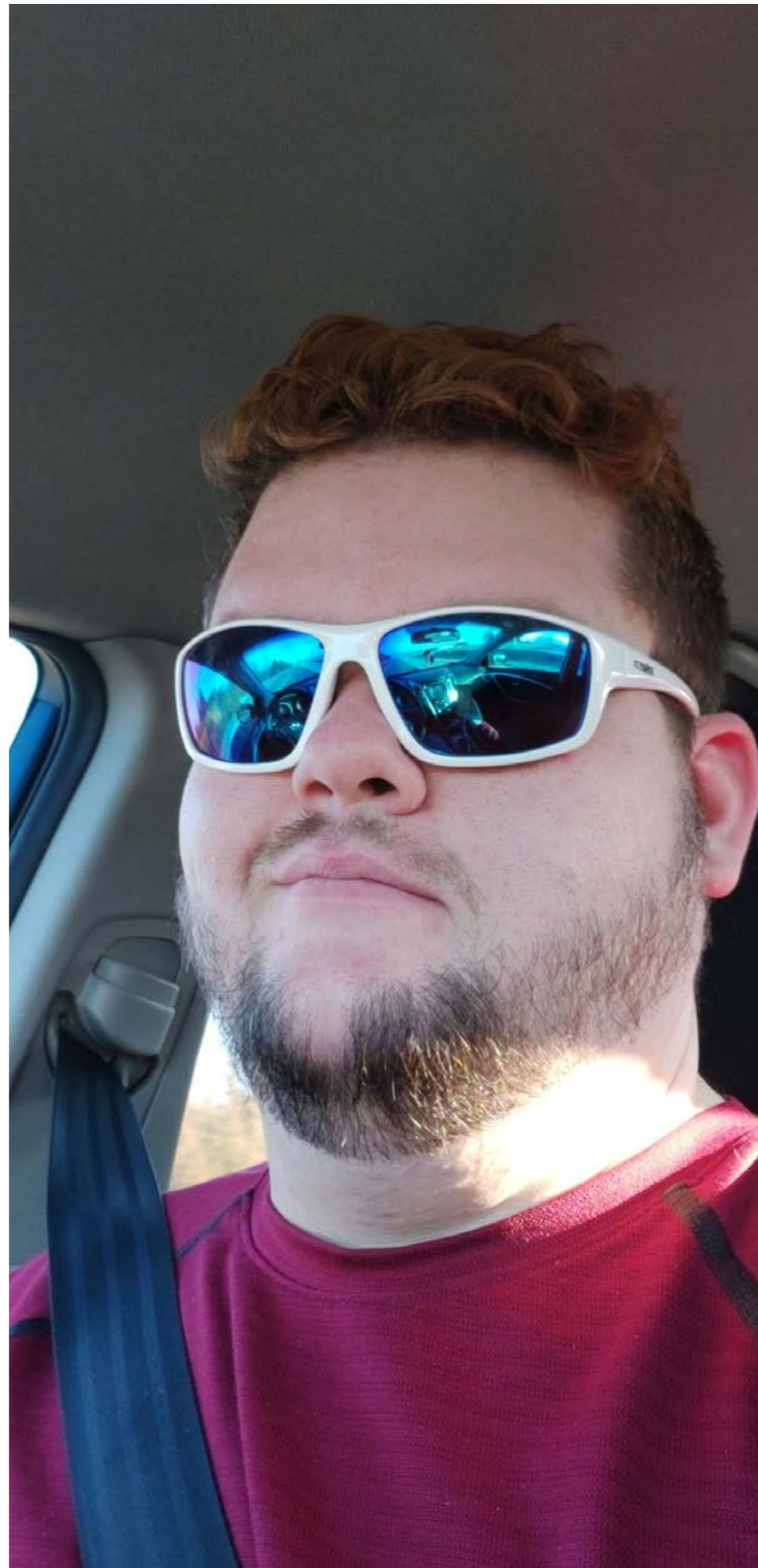
April 12



Rev. Marian Edmonds-Allen is the executive director of Parity, an NYC-based national nonprofit that works at the intersection of faith and LGBT concerns, director of Blessed by Difference, and author at Family Christian.

Marian attended Western Theological Seminary and Eden Theological Seminary and has served in many pastoral capacities, including church planting, parish ministry, and chaplaincy. She is a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Eden Theological Seminary (2023) with the topic Covenantal Pluralism and Mission: Evidence for Healing the LGBT and Faith Divide. Marian is married, has four children, and is a passionate skier and outdoor enthusiast.

Author of:
April 10



Nathaniel is a follower of Jesus and loves being a Dad, Southern gospel music, and Chantilly cake.

Author of:
April 14

