



Lenten Devotional 2022

*The First Presbyterian Church
in the City of New York*

Art

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Introduction

Dear Reader,

This Lent we share the stories of the Bible.

It is our hope that these Scripture passages and personal reflections will be a guide for you as we journey together as a church through this season. Within the pages of this devotional, you will find many different stories and connections made with some of the most well-known stories of the Bible.

During this season, we are diving into the Bible and seeking out some of the most well-known stories of the Bible - the greatest hits if you will! During different times in our lives, we may feel very aligned with some of these stories while other times they miss the mark in our own faith journeys. As we read narratives from across the Old and New Testaments, we remind ourselves how important these stories are to our Church and our faith lives. In this devotional, you will see how the Scripture passages intersect with stories from the lives of our writers, and how these stories impact them. We hope that these reflections might inspire your own reflections on these sacred texts, and invite you to dive deeper into these stories.

Be sure to have your Bible with your devotional because, at the beginning of each day's devotional, you will find a larger Scripture passage to look up and read. All the focus verses are listed below the passage, and unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

I am so grateful to all our writers who put so much thought and effort into their meditations, and for the many hands who made this devotional possible.

Blessings to you during this season of Lent,

Audrey Webber

March 2, 2022

Genesis 1-2:4

*“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;
and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea...”*

“The Dilemma of Dominion” is a lecture by famous Hebrew Bible Scholar Phyllis Trible. I’ve been lucky enough to meet Trible twice: once on an elevator and the other time over lunch. She’s considered a giant in her field and one of the leading voices of feminist biblical interpretation. Although her shaky Virginian drawl of a voice is now 89 years old, she still holds the title well. She highlights an oversight in Genesis 1:26 that marks the beginning of conflict between ecology and humanity in a word: *dominion*. Does this verb “give license or delegate responsibility” she asks? “Or— does it exhort us to preserve the goodness of the earth?”

You may roll your eyes as the answer seems quite simple but I’d caution you to observe your own life and our culture and ask, have we taken this simplicity to heart? Both Genesis and Trible beckon the reader to look closely at God’s unveiling of the world as a kind of balancing act between humanity and everything else. So often we have understood dominion as ruler rather than a shepherd. But what if we’ve been “dominioning” all wrong? We may be given responsibility for a moment but ultimately we are created from— and returned to— that which we have been called to “preserve and protect.”

...from dust to dust...

Look closely and you’ll find a long history of humanity confusing protection with *exploitation*. What better way to grapple with this dilemma than through the practice of lent? Ask yourself, where else may God be calling you to hold your responsibilities with an open palm rather than a clenched fist? How might we reinstate a posture of humility to our very first calling by God and rediscover our own desperate need of a shepherd?

Hannah Faye Allred

March 3, 2022

Genesis 2:15 - 3:24

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

I have a hard time with the Creation story, as I believe women and men are equal. Many use this verse to support beliefs that women should be subservient to men. I believe this story, along with many others is to help explain the unexplainable. Historically, that’s how it was done. So, when I received this particular scripture for my devotion... oh boy!

Time to re-read, and for the first time jumping out at me, I saw the gravitas of the very first sentence. *The Lord God took man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and **keep it***. As co-chair of our Earth Care Action Group, these words are doubly poignant. From the very beginning, we were asked to take care of this amazing planet. Early writers understood clearly, earth is our Garden of Eden, a gift to humans for life and survival, that came with a charge, that we are to *keep it, to keep earth*.

God also gave us every living creature, so we would not be alone. And yes, we ate the forbidden fruit and saw the truth. But if we now see good and evil, clearly, we can see the evil of not taking care of our planet and its creatures. Let’s live up to this charge, because “without a planet, nothing else will matter,” wrote the Ford Foundation when they announced their divestment from fossil fuel.

Kathie Young

March 4, 2022

Genesis 4:1 - 4:16

“But on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So, Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.”

When I read this story, I want to see myself as Abel. The brother in favor of the Lord, who is validated for his work and is killed by his jealous brother. But when I sit with it, how many times have I been Cain in my life? More than I'd like to admit.

As I moved away from thinking about this story in such literal terms and instead what lessons could be present for me, it was clear to see that too often I can be consumed by those feelings of jealousy, inadequacy, and revenge. Can't we all?

Cain is expected to continue his work toiling the land without the Lord's regard because it is the 'right' thing to do. In the same way that we are meant to love our neighbors and work for justice, without fanfare over our commitment to the Lord.

We see colleagues praised for work we feel is lesser than ours or our church communities celebrating folks who helped with the most recent church function when we have been behind the scenes keeping things running for years. I don't know about you but for me, this can be hard to take, and I can find myself acting out or at least complaining about that person to friends and family.

The lesson for me, today at least, is learning to not act on those feelings of jealousy and anger. As difficult as it can be to keep toiling our land when we don't feel that there is regard for our work, we must keep toiling because all of our work has a purpose even if it is not the work being highlighted in the moment.

Alexis Schutz

March 5, 2022

Genesis 7 - 8:12

“And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.”

This story about Noah is probably one of the best-known stories about scripture, but also one that many people have not read in the Bible in a long time. What stood out to me in my reading of this familiar story was the very end of verse 16, where the story tells us, “Then the Lord closed the door behind them.” I almost laughed right out loud; this kind of detail is exactly the kind of detail that seems to be inserted to answer puzzling questions from inquisitive minds, such as “how did the door of the ark get closed?” It also is such a practical task for God to manage! Left to my own imagination, I might have come up with an elaborate pulley system from the inside to close the door of the ark. But here a great gift is shared with us, we are in relationship with a God who will close the door behind us. A God whose intention is to protect us, a God who cares for “every creature that breathes.” The humility of this act reminds us that like God, we are called to do the simplest tasks, like God did closing the door to the ark, to help each other and build a stronger community.

Barbara Davis

March 6, 2022

Genesis 15:1-6

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.”

But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

March 7, 2022

Genesis 18

*“So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?’ ...But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid.
He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”*

On our social media platforms, we posed this question.
Below are some of the answers we received.

In Genesis 18, Sarah was 90 years old when God came to her and told her she was going to have a baby.
She then laughed at God when she heard the news.
How would you have reacted to this news?

I'd probably cry! Carrying a child is hard enough
when you are young and not sore!

Started knapping...IMMEDIATELY!
Sleep is a distant memory Sarah <3

Run! Just kidding! I think I would have laughed too
but also hopeful that it was possible.

Pure shock, denial, so many stages of grief but ending
with happiness!

March 8, 2022

Genesis 25:19 - 25:34

How are we to think of this familiar story in which God's plan relies on deception -- a deception in which Rebekah conspires with her younger son Jacob to cheat elder son Esau of his birthright? Let me suggest ways we might think about these verses, which tell only the first part of this story about the (*not-quite* twins), Jacob and Esau. Clearly, a birthright is important: an ancestral honor that is confirmation of important rights due a firstborn son (think primogeniture). And when Esau agrees to trade his birthright for a meal, the Bible says, "Thus Esau despised his birthright."

Once the meal happens, the trickery is revealed. Long story short, Esau is enraged, vows vengeance, and ultimately moves to a neighboring land. We're outraged, too: a birthright -- critical to Israelite culture -- won by outright deception? And God approves? Seems unfair, right? Maybe we're asked here to compare human fairness to the exercise of God's will. Meanwhile, Esau settles in Edom, a land to the south of Judah, and becomes the "father of his people," the Edomites. So, maybe this story is etiological as well, a tale explaining to later generations "how things came to be." Imagine Israelite students asking the scribes: "how did Edom come to be? They are much like us but is there a reason Edomites are hostile to us in Judah?" The Jacob and Esau story posits an ancient grudge as a cause.

This story is another of many such stories in Hebrew scripture in which God's plan involves a degree of trickery, or defiance of human expectations, reversal of primogeniture, conception for "barren" women, unsettling human "fairness" here and there, and regularly riding over notions humans hold most dear. As the old hymn says, "God moves in a mysterious way God's wonders to perform."

So, take your pick, or pick all three: this story is about the peril (for men) in abandoning one's birthright (maybe birthrights was a hot-button issue at the time of the story's writing), or the story serves to explain how Esau became the father of the then-hostile Edomites. Or it reminds us yet again that God -- even if God's ways appear as trickery or unfairness, upsetting apple carts -- is God, and we are not. We are creatures and God is Creator. That God for that.

David Richardson

March 9, 2022

Genesis 37

“He said to them, ‘Listen to this dream that I dreamed.’”

Do you remember your dreams? I have always been a vivid dreamer. We know that dreams are our subconscious unpacking some event or idea or emotion (anxiety being a very common one - have you ever dreamed about your teeth falling out?). Historically though, dreams were often considered prophetic, granting some wisdom or instruction. Joseph’s story revolves around prophetic dreams: first, his own two dreams that we read about here, and then dreams of those imprisoned with him in Egypt, and finally, Pharaoh’s dreams.

Joseph knows his dreams are a message from God and clearly his family must have recognized that too. We know that when Joseph’s brothers found out about his dreams, they felt so threatened that they sold him into slavery, and from there he was eventually imprisoned. Joseph never lost faith throughout, because of what he saw in those first two dreams. His interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams led him to power in Egypt, eventually reuniting him with his family, forgiving his brothers, and fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham. All because he truly listened and understood God’s message and patiently, faithfully, waited.

God frequently talks to us, maybe through our dreams, especially in our everyday lives, but are we listening? Today we are so easily distracted by all the motions around us, by devices, by obligations, that we often don’t take the time to sit quietly and really listen to what God is saying to us. You probably did not wake up this morning from a prophetic dream with a message from God. Instead, on this day in your Lenten journey, take a few minutes to pray and listen. Think about how you can incorporate time in your daily life and activities to patiently and faithfully listen and, like Joseph, really understand what God is telling you.

Laura Bowden

March 10, 2022

Exodus 1:8 - 2:10

“When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.”

When I was a little girl, I remember hearing about Moses for the first time. I became so obsessed with it that I constantly drew drawings of Moses as a baby in the water, and repeatedly watched the Prince of Egypt animated movie. There is something to be said for continually coming back to the same story at different stages of life and noticing things that you have never noticed before. While I now think of my two-year-old son when I hear this story, I love going back to how I thought of this story as a young girl.

I wonder sometimes how we might find ways to carry these stories with us. Where does Moses show up in our lives? There are certainly points of this story that we would prefer to erase with the unimaginable actions of Pharaoh, but there are also points of inspiration as we witness the incredible faith and sacrifice of the midwives. It is these individuals who we can carry with us. These people who hold us and inspire us to act as they would. There is also comfort to be had as we witness Moses' sister, commonly thought to be Miriam, care for her baby brother as she watched him from a distance. How might we be inspired by this story? Where do we fit into it? I have a very strong feeling that you are in it too.

Audrey Webber

March 11, 2022

Exodus 3:1-15

“Who am I?”

This scripture presents several themes; one that stands out is Moses’ question to God, “Who Am I?”

This is a question we often ask ourselves; specifically when we experience important life challenges and changes (i.e. adolescence, marriage, new life, and death).

In these moments we question our strength and life’s meaning; they test our character and sense of self. Without these tests, we go about our life with blinders, living contently. While difficult, these experiences help us better understand “who we are”.

For me, I lost my closest friend, Russell, to cancer at a young age. I was fortunate to spend his last month here together in the hospital. While fearful, Russell approached his end with great grace and poise. Like the bush in the scripture, I felt like my world was burning. But through this experience, I re-learned all the wonderful things about my friend, and more importantly how he helped to shape my identity, and answer the question “who am I.”

I can now answer the question just a little bit better. I know how Russell shaped me (and vice versa). I also know that I have many pieces of those around me (family, friends, neighbors, etc.), and how our identities are intertwined and influenced by each other.

They are me and I am them.

While I miss Russell every day, I am grateful for the experience and how it reassured my sense of identity, faith, and greater life perspective.

And I take comfort in God’s message in this reading: *“I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you.”*

Robert Ryan Ellington Nuzzo

March 12, 2022

Exodus 14:1-25

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.”

Often, I find myself frozen with inaction, sorting through all the options when buying plane tickets, or steeling my nervous self to contact someone about an opportunity. By the time I’m ready to act, I sometimes find I’m too late. It can be easy to think that whatever happens is meant to happen and to forget that I have some agency in the matter.

Even Moses, who had boldly led the Israelites out of Egypt, had his own deer-in-the-headlights moment. Caught between Pharaoh’s army and the deep Red Sea, with Israelites panicking and questioning why they followed Moses in the first place, Moses’s advice to them was oddly passive: “The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”

But it seems the Lord was having none of that, and said to Moses “Why do you cry out to me?” (Why do you expect me to do your work for you?) The Lord told Moses to get his people going. And only when Moses moved his own hand did the Lord work with him, miraculously parting the water to give him and his people a path crossing to safety.

This story is a reminder to me to get off the couch - even though I am literally on a couch now as I write this - and get moving.

Rick Bassett

March 13, 2022

Exodus 20:1-21

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

March 14, 2022

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

“It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

Moses at age one hundred and twenty has, at God’s command, relinquished his leadership of Israel and passed it on to Joshua with the following words of admonition and inspiration, ‘be strong...be courageous ...be fearless. The Lord will never leave you nor forsake you. These powerful words often resonate in my being throughout my journey of faith and devotion to the Father.

I can’t imagine being Moses at that advanced age wandering through the desert for 40 years due to his people’s unbelief and disobedience.

Then again, it’s hard to be strong, courageous, or fearless in these scary times of the increasing cases of the omicron variant, poverty and homelessness, the tragedy of the mentally ill roaming the streets...it makes you wonder if it’s worth getting up in the morning. Has God left and forsaken us? How can he allow these terrible things to keep happening?

But then I realized that through our suffering we find compassion to comfort others. Going through difficult times tests our faith and love and that faith and love can grow and make us stronger. The same God that led Joshua into the “Promised Land”, is the same God that leads us through these challenging times.

Lisa Polite

March 15, 2022

Joshua 1

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.”

At Joshua 1, we find ourselves at a time of great transition. Moses has died, and like a scene from HBO’s “Succession,” the Lord is laying out who earns Moses’s divine legacy. Within the opening verses, there is a great promise for those who heed the Word of the Lord: success, prosperity, and the peace and presence of God Himself. The charge placed upon Joshua, and the encouragement that lies within the opening verses, carry a similar meaning for believers today - that like He was for Moses, the Lord promises “I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.” This promise from God is both unconditional and conditional, a two-way street. In fact, at the core, Joshua is a story of radical obedience to God and His law. God warns that we must be “careful to obey all the law [His] servant Moses gave [us]; do not turn from it to the right or to the left.” In other words: it's not comfort, not health, not wealth, and not prosperity in this world, but radical obedience to Christ which seals this promise from God. In this obedience, we risk losing all these otherworldly desires. But in the end, such risk finds its reward in Christ.

Radical obedience - Aren’t we taught never to say never, that hardly are absolutes absolute? From one perspective, this could make Joshua 1 seem daunting, impossible even. But there is something quite peaceful in knowing what God expects from us *absolutely*. Unlike this crazy world, we find ourselves in now, with seemingly daily changing safety protocols, we can at the very least know God is constant.

Jon Harris

March 16, 2022

Joshua 2

“Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith.”

Rahab is one of the gutsiest characters in the whole Bible, an unlikely ‘Bond girl’ if you will. Her story is one of deep personal risk, bravery, and defiance in the face of impossible odds. When faced with the threat of extinction at the hands of Joshua and his army, she’s quick on her feet and calculated, saving the lives of her two would-be captors, then negotiates their lives in exchange for her own and her family. Her story reads like a John le Carré thriller. The real plot twist, however, is when this woman, often described as a prostitute, becomes the great-grandmother to King David and shows up in the lineage of Jesus the Messiah in Matthew 1:5.

Quite a turn of events for this ‘harlot’ who barely gets her own chapter but is responsible for birthing two of the Bible’s most influential characters. We may never know Rahab’s full story, but we are given a glimpse of her audacity and resolve in verse 12. She’s a perfect example of how we might choose to approach this season of lent for ourselves.

What would happen if we approached our own spiritual disciplines with this same intensity and risk. “Give me a sign of good faith” would be quite the demand in our prayer lives. But why not try it? It begs the question: what kind of a sign are we looking for and for whom? Are we asking God to show *us* a sign of good faith, that they are present and active in our lives like we are told? Or are we asking for God to show us what good faith looks like for *ourselves*?

I suppose the answer lies wherever you need God most right now—in the present or in the example. But either way, the boldness of the ask and the journey to the answer is sure to be a thrill of its own.

Hannah Faye Allred

March 17, 2022

Judges 4:1-16, 23-24

“Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help...”

The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. God sold them to King Jabin of Canaan, and they were cruelly oppressed for 20 years. They cried out to the Lord for help. Deborah a Prophetess and Judge at the time, summoned Barak to take 10,000 troops from Naphtali and Zebulun because the enemy will be drawn out, and God will give Israel victory.

The Israelites go back and forth from doing evil and good over hundreds of years. they cry out for help, God saves them, they do evil, it starts over again. But why go through all of this? Because each time a new lesson is learned, growth happens, and we become closer with God.

As time goes on, and new generations forget, we drift away by flatteries, desires, and tangible idols, but God sends discomfort and oppression to wake us up and pull us back home to Him.

Unchanged in sin, we remain oppressed. realizing and stopping sin frees us.

So, I have to catch myself when I say “oh I wish that didn’t happen”, or “I wish I didn’t know that” and trust that I will learn and grow in God’s Plan. And try to always be a cheerful giver in my response to discomfort, using my eyes to see the Grace in every situation, to be free.

Robert James Cooper

March 18, 2022

Ruth 1

“But Ruth said, ‘Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.’”

The story of Naomi and her family has especially resonated with me this last year because of the difficult and potentially life-changing choices she and her daughters-in-law had to make, without any hints of what the future holds for them.

In addition to our daily decisions of where to get our morning coffee or what new streaming show to watch, we’re faced with choices now we thought we’d never have to make or end up making them earlier than expected. We’ve postponed much-needed vacations, spent holidays apart from loved ones, and navigated difficult conversations at work and home.

But then I think of the joyous choices I’ve made as a result of our world right now, and the new friendships and experiences that have enriched my life because of it. When we became so used to hearing the phrase “No, you can’t do that right now”, we found opportunities to safely gather and bring our community closer together. I especially think of our church lawn movie nights this past fall when people passing by decided to sit and enjoy with us, choosing to take a moment of calm on our much-loved grounds instead of hurrying by.

During this season I plan to reflect on and be gracious for the fact that God fills our days with choices, and no matter our decision He will be there with us each step of the way.

Emily Dawson

March 19, 2022

1 Samuel 16:1-13

“Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.”

When reading this scripture, I was reminded of how, with faith and trust in God, God will lead and guide me because I know God always has a plan.

In this reading, Samuel is able to go to Bethlehem and anoint David as king as God tells him to because of his trust in God, knowing that God has a way and will guide and lead all of God’s children. Samuel is obedient and trusting, remaining faithful, knowing that whatever will happen, God oversees and plans everything right.

I am someone who constantly stresses and worries about the future, always pondering on how everything will turn out because the future can feel full of uncertainty at times. During the pandemic these past couple of years, even though I did not have a very difficult or mentally challenging experience, I still found myself worrying from time to time, mostly over school and an academic career ahead of me.

In the times that I feel anxious or think doubtfully, it is important for me to remember that God has a plan for me, for everyone and everything. By following and praying to God, I know that everything will turn out as it is supposed to.

Isabel Noh

March 20, 2022

1 Samuel 17:48-57

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.

When Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this young man?" Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." The king said, "Inquire whose son the stripling is." On David's return from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with the head of the Philistine in his hand. Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

March 21, 2022

1 Kings 18:16 - 18:46

“Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God and that thou has turned their heart back again.”

On a Saturday morning in July, as I sat with my sister in the backspace of her apartment, I found God. Like a lightning bolt, it hit me. An unexpected moment of clarity and truth, a moment I have been searching for for many years. My faith journey has been paths of twists and turns, dead-ends and wrong ways, yet one always longing for meaning and connection. It wasn't until a year ago, when my sister introduced me to Stoicism, that I began a new one. One that would lead me to God, to Church, and to this reading. One where I say and believe that I know God and that God has turned my heart back again.

Katie Adams

March 22, 2022

Isaiah 6:1-8

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple.”

In which year was it that things fell apart? Was it 2020, when covid-19 swept across the planet, George Floyd died, and smoke from west coast wildfires filled our eastern skies? Was it 2021, when the pandemic failed to end, the two-year-old son of immigrants drowned with his parents in Ida’s floods, and birds literally dropped dead from the sky?

I wonder if the year that King Uzziah died felt similarly awful. A formerly great and long-reigning leader had been dethroned, became ill with leprosy, and died in ignominy. It is in this year that Isaiah has a vision and receives a commission from God.

The task God has for Isaiah isn’t so pleasant. But Isaiah answers God’s call before learning what that task is. Perhaps Isaiah is too overwhelmed to ask. But did God also select this particular year to appear before Isaiah precisely because of its uncertainty, its awfulness? Could that have been the moment at which Isaiah was truly open to God’s call, whatever that call might be?

I wonder if God may be more likely to call on us now, too. Or maybe we’re more likely to listen. And maybe, just maybe, as we survey the wreckage of these years’ destruction, we may also find the holy seed that is the stump in our broken land.

Nicky Moody Ordway

March 23, 2022

Jeremiah 1

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

God clearly knows us so well as God made us, but how do we describe God? In our Visual Arts Bible Study and during one of our staff meetings, we asked everyone this question: If you could describe God as a color what color would you choose?

Fill in your own answer in the blank line below!

God is a shimmery blue color that is constantly moving.

God is light blue like the sky.

God is green as nature is green.

God is yellow as it is the happiest color.

God is like a bright light.

God is a rainbow of colors.

God is a light sky-blue color - very ethereal.

God is an organic green.

God is a pastel pink color like the sky after it rains.

God is _____.

March 24, 2022

Jonah 1-2

“What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish.”

In Jonah 1 - 2, we hear the story of Jonah and the whale. A classic story of the fantastical miracles God has performed. On the surface, it might seem impossible to relate to so a story that feels so out of reach. But I can certainly understand the feeling Jonah must have had when he felt cast away and so lost. Accepting help and advice from others and actually following said advice, for us more stubborn folk, can often feel like being asked to jump into the belly of a whale. God offered his advice in the form of a giant fish and in turn, protect a frightened Jonah from the storm. Even after Jonah had tried to run away from God by taking to a ship to escape responsibility. It can take us so much time and inner debate to see the error in our ways and accept responsibility and own up to our actions. And much like a Jonah, we must remember to listen and keep faith in those who only wish to protect us. Even if it is protecting us from our own mistakes, it can be the most difficult task for us to accept help when we are falling down a darker path. In these times of darkness or discovery, let us remember Jonah by keeping faith in those whales in our lives who only wish to help in our hours of need; they are a gift from God.

Sophia Canfield

March 25, 2022

Daniel 6

“So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you.”

There were moments, during these past two years of pandemic parenting when I might’ve seriously considered swapping spots with Daniel.

Facing a den of ferocious lions would surely be terrifying, but I contemplate the potential upside: a quiet night alone; a respite from the demands of full-time caregiving to two young kids; a reprieve from the endless roars over mask mandates, and vaccines, and remote learning.

I’m blessed, of course, to be here. I’m grateful to be healthy today, mindful of those who’ve suffered such incredible loss and hardship. In comparison, my frustrations over another classroom quarantine – or another sink full of dirty dishes – feel small, petty, selfish. Still, the little things can get me down, and sometimes, they can even seem to overwhelm me. There are too many variants. Not enough tests. And more canceled holiday plans. Again. It makes me want to scream.

I recently read about a group of Boston mothers, who gathered in a field outdoors. They stood in a circle, socially distanced, and howled wildly into the January night, to express their collective anguish and frustration. It didn’t make Omicron disappear – but I hope that primal release, and sense of community, helped them to feel better.

At the very least, it reminded me that – even in the dark and coldest hours, there is someone listening.

Philip Ross

March 26, 2022

Esther 4:1-17

“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.”

The book of Esther would make a great movie; it has a wealthy and powerful king, a wise and beautiful queen, a threat to the very existence of the People of Israel, and a heroic rescue.

Chapter 4 focuses on Queen Esther’s response when she is called upon to save the people; her actions are that of a great general.

Her kinsman, Mordecai, the one who schemed to make her queen, stands wailing at the city gates wearing sackcloth and ashes, so she sends her maid with clothes for him, thinking that’s the problem.

After Mordecai refuses the clothes she asks him what he does needs. Mordecai tells her that Haman is plotting to persuade the King to allow him to kill all the Jews, and says that only she can intervene with the King. Esther reminds Mordecai that the punishment for addressing the King without invitation is death. He reminds her that if the Jews are killed, so too will she be.

Queen Esther identifies the peril, weighs the risks, and acts, putting her fate into the hands of God, saying, “If I perish, I perish.” She puts the needs of the people above her own, she uses all her gifts, skills, and wiles to turn the tables on the evil Haman, and she saves the day.

I’d watch that movie.

Barbara Sherman

March 27, 2022

Job 2

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

March 28, 2022

Psalm 23

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

Reading Psalm 23 always brings me back to my childhood. My first contact with the idea of God was through this psalm that my mother used to recite to me and my sisters; by the time I was five years old, I was able to recite it by heart. The thing that I was more fascinated about it was the idea of God as a shepherd; I remember myself asking my mom over and over about the subject. “The Lord is my shepherd...” the poem recites, but why if he was even more than a king, he was going to become for me a shepherd?

The Catholic Church where my family participated in Montevideo, Uruguay was called then The Jackson’s Church, a small but lovely Neo-Gothic style church two blocks from my home. Today it is known as the Church of the Holy Family. I spent a lot of time in my church, playing soccer, watching movies on Sundays after mass, meeting new kids. In the garden of the Church, there is a bronze statue of Christ crucified and as a five-year-old kid, I was very troubled as to why my shepherd had to die that way. I took my First Communion when I was six-year-old and I remember during the studies we did before communion, I asked the priest, Father Chazaro, about this question.

Life goes on, for many years my church was a sort of my second home, I was involved in church activities and often I was an altar boy, but always my vision of God came through the way is presented in Psalm 23. My close contact with The Jackson’s Church finished when I started high school, however, I was every day passing in front of my church and while making the sign of the cross I was giving a glance to the bronze statue of Christ crucified and inside my head, the verses came out: “He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul...” then I kept on walking with a brighter heart.

Daniel Duque

March 29, 2022

Proverbs 1

“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.”

Even though I always enjoyed school, once I graduated college I thought of my education as “complete.” I was glad to be done with school as I much prefer the working lifestyle to that of a student. But really, learning is a lifetime pursuit, and even if we are no longer students in the formal sense, our education is never complete. We’ve all heard the maxim “Learn something new every day”—I often joke, upon encountering some new information, “Ok, I’m done! Check the learning box for today!” But Proverbs here makes it very clear that our learning is never over—even when you’ve satisfied today’s obligation there’s always tomorrow, and even the wise are challenged to add to their learning, day after day, never reaching an end to our education.

But more to the point, it’s not just about learning new facts so we can dream of beating Amy Schneider’s Jeopardy! win streak. The real key to knowledge is the application of it, using knowledge to inform the ways in which we choose to behave and react, to interact and engage with the world around us. The teachings of the Gospel are no less valuable here than those of Emily Post or Dale Carnegie. It is a reminder that our faith journey, like all learning, is a lifelong experience. There will always be more we can learn, deeper we can go, and endless ways to apply the teachings of Christ to our daily lives.

Amy Cooper

March 30, 2022

Joel 2:28-32

We asked our Wednesday Bible Study this question: What do you imagine it is like for God to “pour out” God’s spirit on all flesh? Is what you imagine like what the text describes or something else?

I think that this passage prophesied that the Holy Spirit would be given to all of us, not just to the Children of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was given to all of us on Pentecost. And since then, the Holy Spirit has lived on all of us. Whether all of us have listened to His whispers is another matter. And yet, Humanity has evolved in knowledge and understanding in the 2000 plus years since. The sciences that humanity has pursued in the ensuing 2000 plus years have provided an ever-evolving understanding of ourselves and the Universe. I think that this is all connected. Science is not separate from spirituality, it is informing it to those who recognize that all is connected. I think that this is what the text describes.

Verse 30 in particular has come to pass: “I will show portents in the heavens and on earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.”

My interpretation of this is that this was a prophecy of what humanity is seeing as we explore the Universe with the Hubble Telescope and other telescopes being used to explore the cosmos.

The portents He/She shows us on Earth are the volcanic eruptions, the huge cyclones and hurricanes, and storms...they are the reminders of Her/His hand in all that occurs in the Nature that surrounds us and that we are intrinsically a part of.

If God would pour out God's whole spirit on us all, it would change everyone's heart from selfishness to love and put our hands and feet to work for God's kingdom right here and now.

March 31, 2022

Joel 2:28-32

We received so many wonderful answers to our text yesterday from our Wednesday Bible Study that we had to include part II of a few of their answers to this question: What do you imagine it is like for God to “pour out” God’s spirit on all flesh? Is what you imagine like what the text describes or something else?

Verses 30 – 31 are vivid descriptions of the eventual effects that we will experience because we have not been good stewards of the planet that God gave mankind, Blood, fire, and columns of smoke, a sun we can no longer see, and a moon that is no longer white...

This indeed is the great and terrible day of the Lord’s wrath.

I don’t know if mankind does not change its ways, that there will even be a remnant left anywhere, let alone on Mt Zion or in Jerusalem, to evoke the Lard’s name. If ever mankind needed the Lord to pour out his spirit on us, it would be now. But I think we need more than spirit. We need God’s help for us to use intelligence and commitment and the courage and energy to act together to deal with climate change.

In this passage, we learn that God wants a reciprocal relationship with his people. God gives us his power - inducing visions, resurrecting life, healing the sick, because the people believe in him. He teaches and we learn that only by believing in God will we receive the benefits of his power. Only by believing in him will we be saved from the end of days and death and brought back to him at the end.

When I imagine God's Spirit pouring out on me, in Joel, it is gentler, like putting on a clean new pair of glasses so I can see the wonders of the world. But maybe I am too timid, afraid of having visions and dreams.

April 1, 2022

Luke 2:1-20

“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

We asked our Church School students this question: What do you remember about the birth story of Jesus? What is your favorite part? Here are some of their answers! Answer for yourself below!

The kings went to see Jesus.

He was born in a stable in Bethlehem.

His mother's name was Mary, his father's name was Joseph.

I remember _____.

April 2, 2022

Mark 1:16-20

“Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

Although I am a “cradle Presbyterian,” I never heard the term “being called” until I went to the College of Wooster. Some classmates spoke of “being called” to become ministers. One even said he was “called” to run a radio station. I thought “being called” meant knowing what you wanted to do with your life. I vaguely knew I was predestined to do something, but what?

Although both my parents were in public service, education, and health, I did not see those pathways – or any others - for myself. They arrived at my graduation with a contract to teach in the same rural school in which my mother taught. Without a clear alternative, I signed. After a miserable year of trying to teach intellectually challenged 6th graders (with only six weeks of training), I definitely knew I did not want to teach – ever again!

I experimented with various vocations: being a glorified chaperon at a woman’s college, while I worked on my MA in English, and then a try at merchandising at a magazine. One day when throwing away posters from an advertising campaign, I realized that I wanted my life to mean something more. Now in my late twenties, I decided that I really wanted to teach – English in a high school. Still, without practice teaching, an interviewing principal deduced from my magazine experience I was qualified to advise the school newspaper. I was hired.

At last, I had found my “calling.” Now 60 years later, I am still at it, helping a young Uyghur woman write her dissertation for her Fordham PhD. A “call” may not come as a clear voice. Rather, it may be slowly discovering a path that will give meaning to your own life and that of others.

Irene Gilman

April 3, 2022

Luke 4:31-41

He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath. They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" When the demon had thrown him down before them, he came out of him without having done him any harm. They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, "What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!" And a report about him began to reach every place in the region.

After leaving the synagogue he entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him about her. Then he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.

As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them. Demons also came out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah.

April 4, 2022

John 3:1-21

Nicodemus? Why, you might ask, is the story of Nicodemus included in a collection of devotional readings about Lent? The most obvious answer is: Because it contains one of the most quoted verses in the entire Bible, the one in which Jesus so eloquently conveys to us the very essence of Easter-John 3: 16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

But Jesus says much more than that in the preceding 15 verses, explaining to Nicodemus that one must be "born again to see the kingdom of God," that the second birth is a spiritual one, and that we are born again spiritually when we come to believe in Jesus.

What Jesus does not do is to give to Nicodemus or us any guidance on what we should do to celebrate Easter. The Bible never mentions Easter and both its name, and the Lenten elements of prayer, fasting, and penitence were introduced by us humans more than a century after the resurrection.

So, as we reflect during this Lenten season on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, let us ask both ourselves and Jesus what it is that Jesus would have us do to prepare for Easter this year, what we should pray for, what to expect to achieve by fasting, what should we be penitent about, and whether there is any other guidance that Jesus would care to give us. And as we do this, let us remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:2: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Nicodemus came to Jesus in the dark of night, and we will be preparing for this year's Easter celebration in the dark of the Covid pandemic. Throughout the Lenten season, may we do the things necessary to renew our minds and spirits in anticipation of both Easter and life beyond the pandemic, seeking always the "perfect will of God" for ourselves and
The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York.

Duane Wall

April 5, 2022

Matthew 9:18-26

We asked our Wednesday Bible Study this question. Who do you most relate to in the passage? The leader of the synagogue? Their daughter? The woman with the hemorrhage? Jesus' disciples? Tell us a little about why you relate to them!

Of all the characters in this passage, I relate to the woman who was hemorrhaging. Of course, not because of physical ailment, but because of my faith in religion, not in God, not in Jesus, but in religion as a way to be brought closer to them, had been hemorrhaging for a long time. But I kept faithful to them in my heart always, finding ways to worship them and to be connected to them in my own way, mostly alone. And then, I found my way to First Church, and it has been like "touching his cloak." I had been alone in my faith and that is not what Christianity is supposed to be, is it? Christianity is about sharing belief and being part of a community of faith. I am touching his cloak and
I am being made well.

I identify most with the people who laughed at Jesus but then who believed in Him when they heard the reports of her raising.

April 6, 2022

Matthew 9:18-26

We received so many wonderful answers to our text yesterday from our Wednesday Bible Study that we had to include part II of a few of their answers to this question: Who do you most relate to in the passage? The leader of the synagogue? Their daughter? The woman with the hemorrhage? Jesus' disciples? Tell us a little about why you relate to them!

This passage telling two examples of Jesus' healing is a stunning testament to the power of faith. By this point in Jesus' life, he has gained a reputation for being able to cure the sick and raise the dead. People have spread the word and more clamor for his help. I think of the woman with chronic bleeding who must have experienced deep despair and desperation over her condition, shunned, excluded, and isolated by her community, and the surging faith she brought forth that in touching his cloak, she would be healed.

Her assurance in Jesus' ability to heal is far more than hope. The trueness of her faith in him, and the humility with which she approaches him, are both deeply moving. And then to be rewarded for her action! What overwhelming relief and joy she must have felt, and deep confirmation of her conviction in her faith. May we all continue to explore the depths of a faith such as hers, and trust in the power of God.

In the Matthew passage, I identify most with the leader of the synagogue. I spend a lot of my time trying to help others, and most of all my daughters, and I would do anything for them. That my faith could bring my daughter back from death, that God through Jesus will hear me if I kneel before him, is a great hope, a great comfort.

April 7, 2022

Luke 10:38-42

“Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying.”

I’ve often wondered about the relationship between sisters Martha and Mary. Who is the stronger sister and who is the weaker? Was there sibling rivalry brewing for years, and did the invited guest become the catalyst for Martha to shame her sister in His presence?

It is Martha who welcomes Jesus into their home and, as any good hostess, is busy in the kitchen preparing a meal and setting the table. But do you leave alone the guest? Mary was home with Martha, and was glad to see Jesus! Sitting at his feet, listening to him and, perhaps, looking up at him in admiration, Mary may have forgotten, even momentarily, that her place was in the kitchen and to do Martha’s bidding.

When speaking to Jesus, Martha expresses familiarity with a dash of complaining and frustration. She assumes that Jesus will agree with her criticism and admonish Mary. However, he *gently* admonishes Martha: “You are worried and distracted by many things; but there is need of only one thing.”

What is the “only one thing”? For centuries, women’s roles at home and in society were severely restricted. But, in this passage, we are learning from Jesus the only one thing required and equally accessible to both men and women is Scripture. In moments of joy and gladness, as it was for Mary, time stands still as we absorb the indelible.

Aretie Haralabatos

April 8, 2022

John 11:1-44

“Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world.’”

Currently, I am in the midst of my teenage years, making my way through high school which seemed like miles away only about two September’s ago. Unfortunately, my freshman year was overtaken by the pandemic. Jesus says, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight?” Making it sound like the day is so long. However, during that first year of high school, just like many, the nights came quickly, and those long days were filled with work and the best attempts to distract me from reality.

Just like Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, I dwell on the what-ifs, and possibilities of what could have happened in the past. Yet, there is also a love that I have for it; I almost romanticize the past, because if the present is bad, the past must have been better. Annoyingly enough, the present will become the past, and that present that I tried to get away from will be romanticized.

It seems to be a vicious cycle as all this time spent looking back is essentially just fearing the future. I am scared of time passing, and more so of my inevitable death. But is fear a reason to stop me from moving forward? No, it is not. Jesus says the day is long and there is light. I will also walk during the day, and I will not stumble.

Ren Davidson

April 9, 2022

Acts 2:1-13

“And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? In our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

Of course, this is the story of a very special Pentecost, the Jewish harvest festival, 50 days after Passover, that drew pilgrims from many countries to Jerusalem around 30 C.E. The empowering Spirit dramatically overwhelms those gathered, calling all to continue God’s mission into the future, calling all without distinction of where they came from. Sort of the reverse of what God had done at the tower of Babel, here the Spirit gave the gift of understanding and unity – not so much speaking in other tongues as it was overcoming the divisive boundaries of human languages. Bringing people together in God’s name.

How many times have we been moved by a poem or a film, by a story or message, that has universal human appeal? Or a picture, worth a thousand words, that calls something deep in each of us, regardless of our life experiences? That’s what’s at the core of our faith, what draws all of us together to proclaim we are followers of Christ, that calls us to join in God’s activity while we’re here on earth. God is love. And God’s universal message of love, most perfectly shown to us in the life of Jesus, invites us to live into that love with lives of faith, of service to others, embracing the overwhelming joy that lives of love bring not only to ourselves but to all we encounter.

Mark Hostetter

April 10, 2022

Matthew 21:1-9

“A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!””

I’m not a painter. I’ve tried it several times in my life, but the results are never something I would dare hang anywhere, much less show. That said I know I would have an incredibly hard time if I were to even attempt a painting of Matthew’s version of the triumphant entry. This has very little to do with my lack of skills. The problem is verse eight.

Matthew speaks of a very large crowd. How many people to paint? A thousand? Five thousand as in the miraculous feeding? Forty thousand rivaling the population of Jerusalem? Two hundred thousand equaling the number of visitors to the city during the Passover feast Jesus is about to celebrate? What size is “a very large crowd that goes ahead of and behind him?” Once you envision the number of people, set your canvas, and prepare your brushes, you will discover you need now to figure out what the crowd looks like. Who are they who spread cloaks and branches on the road? Who sings Hosanna? I know the disciples are there, but I wonder if the Magi who went to the manger are back. I wonder if those who heard the sermon on the mount still follow. I wonder if all those who were healed, taught, or fed are part of the crowd.

And this Holy Week, I wonder if I can be painted in. I wonder if I’m also faithfully following. I wonder if my heart is right and ready. I wonder if I’m walking this walk of faith with others, or if I’m still trying to go at it alone. I wonder if I’m ready and willing to sing with them “Hosanna in the highest” as I join the pilgrimage to the cross.

The good news is that as I wonder, the crowd goes on. And since Matthew doesn’t tell us how large the crowd is, I’m guessing there is always room on the canvas for one more. Thanks be to God!

Greg Stovell

April 11, 2022

Acts 9:1-19

“And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized...”

“What is the difference between Methodists and Baptists?

Methodists say ‘hi’ to each other in the liquor store.”

“How do you know you’re an Episcopalian? You hear something really funny during the sermon and smile as loudly as you can.”

I’ll try a Presbyterian-themed one: “How do you silence a room full of Presbyterians? Ask them to talk about their conversion.”

Author and theologian Frederick Buchner writes, “There are a number of conversions described in the New Testament. You think of Paul seeing the light on the road to Damascus...these scenes took place suddenly, dramatically, when they were least expected.

They all involved pretty much an about-face, which is what the word conversion means. We can only imagine that they all were accompanied by a good deal of emotion.” Simply put, conversion is a *turning*- a turning away from all that separates us from Christ.

For many of us, talking about conversion is uncomfortable. We fear our own experience is not authentic. Maybe it lacked drama. *So what?* Whether it happened in an instant or after a long period of angst; whether on a glorious mountain top or a drab subway car; whether you were 20 or 80- it is your story, your experience, your joy. Claim it as your own, and don’t be afraid to talk about it.

Michael Shake

April 12, 2022

1 Corinthians 13

“Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” (KJV)

1 Corinthians 13 is probably recited at more weddings than any other Biblical passage. It's #1 on Google, according to foreverbride.com. It was also my mother's favorite passage. She and my father had it read at their wedding in 1944. They had met and fallen in love in New York City at Christmas time and joined up in LA before my father shipped out to the South Pacific for war duties. It was read by a justice with two unknown witnesses alongside. My mother grew up in a family that read and could quote huge swaths of the Bible, and she could hold her own with any Jehovah's Witness who came to our door. Whenever she quoted 1 Corinthians 13 in teaching moments with us, she used Charity instead of Love, from the King James Version that she knew.

It's a beautiful passage with either word: thoughtful and paced, calling one to be one's best self, caring for others with generosity of spirit and heart, and giving to one's fellow human being. But Charity takes it out of personal love into the broader context of love for one's neighbor, exercising kindness and selflessness. Not the meaning of charity we may think of today, of donating money and clothes to the poor and needy, but benevolence of spirit, knowing that we are deeply connected, and we bear trials together. Charity is unconditional, unending. While the people of the church in Corinth could prophesy, and speak in tongues, and had the gift of knowledge, Paul guided them to focus on faith, hope, and charity, for only these three are abiding, with Charity being paramount to guide our steps and actions throughout our days on earth.

So, after 58 years of marriage, in tribute to our mother, we read 1 Corinthians 13 at her memorial service, acknowledging the full circle of life and her love for this chapter in the Bible.

Christine Flouton

April 13, 2022

Romans 8:18-25

*“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope.
For who hopes for what is seen?”*

In his letter to the Romans, Paul gives us a simple yet powerful definition of hope: hope saves us, yet it is felt about the unseen. “For who hopes for what is seen?” To me, it sounds a bit like an oxymoron at first glance – how can I experience a feeling about something that I cannot see?

It can be so hard to feel hope when we feel natural anxieties and fears in the face of the unknown. Feeling hope around what is unseen can be difficult, but it also feels so necessary sometimes. I would argue that feeling hopeful is one of the most powerful and empowering emotions a human being can experience. The more I think about hope, the more I feel that being hopeful takes a great amount of courage. It takes guts to believe in something that is not guaranteed, something that is simply unknown. To hope is to be courageous.

What is bringing you hope today? I feel hope for the goodness of our world when I see the kids sing and dance during church school; when I see two strangers engage in a small moment of kindness on the subway; when I feel the weather changing and ushering in yet another new season outside my window. How can a new or renewed hope help save you today?

Emma Gritsch

April 14, 2022

Luke 22:7-24

*“And they went and found it just as he had told them,
and they prepared the Passover.”*

It was just as he had told them. Somehow, I am still always surprised when Jesus predicts exactly what is to happen. The story of the Last Supper in Luke is by far one of my favorite stories in the Bible. There is a celebration, notes of sadness, just enough drama, and most of all Jesus sharing a story, and not just any story but a story that will change the lives of the disciples forever. They just don't know it yet. At times, I think we forget about the mystery of Jesus' actions. The stories are so drilled into our minds that we know what is going to be said before we even read them. As I look at this story with fresh eyes and try to forget what is to come next there is so much unknown in what Jesus is saying. To be honest, it's downright confusing. What do you mean, Jesus, this table will be ready for us? How are you to suffer? Who is going to deny you? Why are you fulfilling this kingdom of God thing you speak about?

If we are the disciples, our glasses are not so clear, and we are longing to just clarify things for us already. Clearly, though, Jesus doesn't want to do that quite yet. Instead, he asks us to simply eat at his table, and not ask too many questions. As we each take up this challenge, I wonder, will you join Jesus at the table? I hope that despite all the uncertainty, despite the somewhat confusing words Jesus is saying, it is still a resounding yes.

Audrey Webber

April 15, 2022

Matthew 27:31-56

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

We all have dark experiences that shake our faith and make us question whether God is in control, whether there is any hope for a brighter day. In the depths of our darkest hours, as the world comes crashing down and evil holds all the cards, in the face of unbearable suffering, when all hope is lost and even our God does not answer us, even then our Christ paves our way. These familiar verses of the passion tell of the very worst humanity could do to our incarnate Jesus – torture and humiliation, suffering and brutal death, beyond anything imaginable. So horrifying and unendurable, even Jesus cries out to God: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And God does not answer.

But God does have the last word, then and now, for we know what happens next. The perishable glory of the man-made temple is torn, the very earth itself quakes, long-dead faithful arise from their tombs, and the good news of our gospel story is written. This is the very essence of our faith, right here, giving meaning to all the stories of our tradition, all the theology, all the ritual. Evil does not prevail, human structures will pass away, and death is not the end. In these all-important verses, Jesus shows us that God’s love, God’s ending to the story, our story, will always triumph. Halleluiah!

Mark Hostetter

April 16, 2022

Revelation 21:1-8

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

April 17, 2022

John 20:1-18

“Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.”

One of the things I love most about parenting is walking my children home from school. As they get older, in middle school and high school now, it is a privilege I have less and less. When they were younger, we would cross onto the block our apartment building was on and they would take off running, jostling into each other, sometimes with their arms out, coats flapping beside them to make bat wings. I would walk behind them, often with all their backpacks and things, just smiling at their freedom and innocence. They would ask me to run with them, but my feet always felt heavy, my body never quite able to gain that lift that they had.

The latter kind of heart-heavy running seems like the kind of running these Easter morning disciples did. Mary runs from the empty tomb to get Peter and the beloved disciple. Peter and the beloved disciple run to the tomb. That urgent motion was weighed down by loss of innocence, lifted by adrenaline and fear. Peter tires as the beloved disciple outruns him. They catch their breath enough to see the stone rolled away, ducking their heads to enter and see the headcloth rolled and laid separately from the other wrappings.

Then, something even more curious happens. Peter and the beloved disciple go back to their homes, and Mary stays in the garden. All that fear, all that urgency, all that running suddenly changes, and they are left deciding what to do with their bodies in relation to where he had been. They choose differently. Two go. One stays. Who do you accompany? Do you stay or do you go? On this Easter morning, we remember the urgency, the adrenaline, the details. And like them, we find ourselves, our bodies, our hearts choosing. Do we need to stay in motion and go home? Do we need to stay in the garden? Maybe different Easter mornings are different for you. Both choices have merits. Both choices are spiritual. Both choices let us encounter the risen Christ. After you run through your fears, which do you choose? Will you stay in the garden? Or walk back home?

Barbara Davis

Lenten Services and Programs

Sunday Worship

Sundays at 11 a.m.

Midweek Services

Wednesdays at noon

Music Meditation begins at 11:45 p.m.

Vesper Service of Music for Lent

Clear Our Heart, O God:

Music for the Journey

Sunday, March 13 at 4:00 p.m.

Lenten Bible Study

Wednesdays at 12:30 p.m.

Holy Week

Palm Sunday Processional

Sunday, April 10 at 9:30 a.m.

Palm Sunday Worship

Sunday, April 10 at 11 a.m.

Maundy Thursday

Worship and Communion

Thursday, April 14 at 7 p.m.

Good Friday Worship

Friday, April 15 at 12 p.m.

Easter Sunday Worship

Sunday, April 17 at 11 a.m.

For more information about
all our Lenten programs visit:

fpcnyc.org/Lent2022

