

Lenten Devotional 2022

March 2 - Ash Wednesday

I once went to a conference on preaching, and I heard some of the finest preachers of the time, including Barbara Brown Taylor and James Forbes, and they were inspiring. Yet the defining moment of that conference for me came during a low-key morning worship service when a young musician, Kyle Matthews, sang a song he had written:

*When I am too tired to sleep, too weary to weep,
and I find myself singing some old sacred song
that my heart still remembers,
I know it is time for prayer, and I find myself singing
and I find myself.*

Listening to his song, I was suddenly in tears, tears that used up all the Kleenex I had in my pocket. I could identify at that moment with being too tired to sleep and too weary to weep. What I needed then - and I need now, especially in the ebb and flow of the pandemic tides – is to come back to myself.

That sums up concisely what the season of Lent is for me: a time of pilgrimage, a deliberate journey to rekindle my soul. It is a journey I do not take alone, but a tradition of pilgrimage that we as a spiritual community embark on together. Because of that, it is easier for me to be intentional and observant, following my own path and at the same time sustained by the company of kindred souls in our church services, our small groups, and our walking of the labyrinth. I begin on Ash Wednesday, not knowing exactly where I am headed or what the outcome may be, but knowing I am seeking again my spiritual self, seeking again those parts of me that I sometimes neglect.

And always, every year, at the end of that pilgrimage, I realize that what I find is sacred space, which by definition is the place where two worlds flow into one another, the visible and the invisible, where the finite world touches the infinite. In that sacred space, I once again find that opening path with a renewed rhythm of grace.

*I find myself singing some old sacred song
that my heart still remembers,
I know it is time for prayer and I find myself singing
and I find myself.*

It is that place, where the finite touches the infinite, that enfolds me when we sing together the "Alleluia" at the close of worship on Easter Sunday morning and I find myself fully there.

Sandy Reimer

March 3



Photo by John Harvey, taken at Macchu Picchu

We are not saints; we are not heroes. Our lives are lived in the quiet corners of the ordinary. We build tiny hearth fires, sometimes barely strong enough to give off warmth. But to the person lost in the darkness, our tiny flame may be the road to safety, the path to salvation. It is not given us to know who is lost in the darkness that surrounds us or even if our light is seen. We can only know that against even the smallest of lights, darkness cannot stand. A sailor lost at sea can be guided home by a single candle. A person lost in a wood can be led to safety by a flickering flame. It is not an issue of quality or intensity or purity. It is simply an issue of the presence of light.

Kent Nerburn, from *Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace*

March 4

Good questions to start the day:

- Who could use an extra measure of grace today? *(See them in your prayerful eye)*
- Whose body is working towards healing? *(See them in your prayerful eye)*
- Who is battling something so fierce inside that it's turned their outward face bitter? *(Pray for them)*
- Whose kindness is so good that we want to model it in our lives? *(Let them know you're inspired)*
- How can I be a bit more heroic today to a world and a people deep in need? *(Go for it. You've got nothing to lose, and you'll never regret a good deed done well)*

Andy Bachmann

March 5

How Joy Works: A Blessing

You could not stop it
if you tried—
how this blessing
begins to sing
every time it sees
your face,
how it turns itself
in wonder
merely at the mention
of your name.

It is simply
how joy works,
going out to you
when you least expect,
running up to meet you
when you had not thought
to ask.

-Jan Richardson

March 6

NANGEIRNEQ

God isn't enough. God knew this.
Got busy with diversity: Eve.
You're not enough. Sure, sure,
You're tough and clever but not enough
To wrestle with lonely, void, not
Hearing the stone hit the well
Water after you drop it. What
In hell? No plop. No answer to
Heart's probe calling out, Poe's
Rapping at your chamber door,
Just you and mortality, just
Us chickens. You need. You
Need what you can't make.
Historians know this. Well-
Known clinical literature of
Western America, circa 1880:
Prairie fever. The speculative
Homestead act, 140 acres, set
Simple farm families far apart
On the tree-shorn, wind-loud,
Flat horizon, dry-summer,
Blizzard-winter snowed-under,
No-radio, no nothing, babies-dying,
Immigrant neighbors talking
Norwegian, Bavarian, alien Prairie.
Women killed themselves
Extravagantly, a show of anger

To the loud, dry, unrelenting
Wind. Men acted out anger in
Mime, killing men, families,
Livestock, proof to the dry,
Unrelenting wind that they
Retained control. Greenland
Inuit seal hunters alone in a
Skin boat little more than an
Overcoat for days, alone, hunter-
Silent, cold wind, awful doubling
Water reflection, wicked cold wind
And suddenly "up" is conjecture, "down"
Is grasping to drown you, "sideways"
Don't mean a thing, no features,
No cookies, no comfort, no surety.
They call it *nangiernerq*, "kayak anxiety."
Some good hunters never go out
Again; too scary. Kayak isn't enough.
Beach your kayak. Learn to speak
Norwegian. Play canasta. Shout, build
A ten-person hot tub. Order a round
Red clown nose. Whatevah. You and
God and the kayak aren't enough.
"The awful other-ness of people" is
Admittedly awful, but better than that
Deafening, dry, featureless prairie wind.

Jan Adkins

March 7 - Eastern Orthodox Lent begins

I still believe
in vintage wisdom.
I believe in patchwork hope,
in distressed journeys, and
the beauty of life-tattered smiles.
I believe in laugh lines for miles.
I still believe in heirloom values,
in hand-me-down hearts, and
in secondhand tables for two.
I believe in giving new light
to faded dreams, and
I believe in
a life renewed ..

Stephen L Lizotte



Photo by Susan Cary

March 8 - International Women's Day



This is a piece I did to practice children's book illustrations in a free online course called Redrawing Black History taught by Lilla Rogers and Tamish Anthony. I enrolled in the course because, when growing up in Utah, I do not remember learning any history related to people of color. It is a representation of Edmonia Wildfire Lewis. She is an American Sculptor from the mid 1800's to the 19th century. Edmonia has a rich history of fighting many preconceived notions of who she was in order to become the first BLPOC to gain fame for sculpture. It was exciting to learn about her life and journey. I encourage you to check it out.

Heidi Stein

March 9

Speak to me of dreams

The inspiring kind that culls the nights work to wisdom
And lights fresh flames of delight in my mind.

Speak to me of hope,

The hope that turns from tinder
To spark
To flame
Signaling a warmth and a depth of breath too impossible to name.

Speak to me of kindness,

Kindling for a life worth living; food for the flame that will grow
And will glow
Giving off warmth and light and love

And speak to me of ashes

The remnant of life's lived folly framed in gray dust
Disintegrating with a single touch, touring our thoughts
To thanks
To praise,
To possibility.

Andy Bachmann

March 10



Photo by John Harvey – White Pelicans on the Suwanee

"Whoever you are, you are human. Wherever you are, you live in the world, which is just waiting for you to notice the holiness in it."

Barbara Brown Taylor

March 11

All healthy religion shows you what to do with your pain, with the absurd, the tragic, the nonsensical, the unjust and the undeserved – all of which eventually come into every lifetime.

Fr. Richard Rohr, from *Transforming Pain*



Photo by Susan Cary

March 12

I counted my years and realized that I have less time to live by, than I have lived so far.

I feel like a child who won a pack of candies: at first, he ate them with pleasure but when he realized that there was little left, he began to taste them intensely.

I have no time for endless meetings where the statutes, rules, procedures and internal regulations are discussed, knowing that nothing will be done.

I no longer have the patience to stand absurd people who, despite their chronological age, have not grown up.

My time is too short: I want the essence; my spirit is in a hurry. I do not have much candy in the package anymore.

I want to live next to humans, very realistic people who know how to laugh at their mistakes and who are not inflated by their own triumphs and who take responsibility for their actions. In this way, human dignity is defended and we live in truth and honesty.

It is the essentials that make life useful.

I want to surround myself with people who know how to touch the hearts of those whom hard strokes of life have learned to grow with sweet touches of the soul.

Yes, I'm in a hurry. I'm in a hurry to live with the intensity that only maturity can give.

I do not intend to waste any of the remaining desserts. I am sure they will be exquisite, much more than those eaten so far.

My goal is to reach the end satisfied and at peace with my loved ones and my conscience.

We have two lives and the second begins when you realize you only have one.

Mario de Andrade (translated)

March 13

We are dog people. In our nearly 45 years of marriage, Nel and I have had three long lived wonderful dogs. Our current dog is on more meds than I am (and that's saying something!). We love Cricket and take care of her in ways that cater to her older personality and abilities. We don't know just when it will be, but I suspect the end is in sight. She is snoring right beside me as I write this. Mortality is real.

Ten years ago, we became cat people, too. We didn't know we could be both until, suddenly, we were. Two cats made their home under our shed 10 years ago, and we adopted them. One was not long for this world, but the other has been part of the family for a decade now. The park near us is a kitten dumping ground. Cricket has become a cat whisperer, inviting dumped kittens to join our critter clan. We've claimed as many as seven around the house. We actually feed more than we claim as "ours" at our house. In the last month I have buried two of the longer-term family members. Our oldest is currently in a tenuous medical situation. We just don't know how that situation will go. Mortality is real.

Last June someone dumped an injured cat in the park. She could only walk on three legs, and I thought, "This cat will never make it." She wouldn't let me close, so I started bringing her food when I walked Cricket early each morning. I thought I was feeding her well as she got heavier. Then I thought she was sick, as she got skinny quite quickly. Well, I can be dumb about such things. I would quickly discover this cat had dropped a litter of four kittens in the woods. With the help of a neighbor who covers when we are out of town, we've been feeding five park cats since last July. Momma cat (Sweet Pea) came to trust me, and I was able to get her spayed. She would meet me in the park about 6:15 every morning and rub all over my legs. Today her four young ones met me for their feeding. I found Sweet Pea beside the road on the edge of the woods. I buried her this morning before church. Mortality is real.

My sister unexpectedly died one year ago this week. I was surprised and sad. Occasionally I still am sad. She was younger than I am. As I deal with my sister's death, I have come to realize that my dogs and cats along the way have given me many gifts. From them I have received joy, amusement, love, and cuddles (at least from the dogs). There is one other gift that those I have buried have given me. Though it does not seem like much of a gift, at least at first, my pet family has taught me mortality is real. They have taught me how to say good-bye. They have taught me to grieve and prepared me, at least a bit, for the deaths of all my immediate family and so many others along the way.

In a very powerful way, my pets have prepared me for Lent. From Ash Wednesday to Good Friday, Lent reminds us mortality is real. Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, and all that stuff I'd rather avoid. But I can't because mortality is real. Death is part of the journey. Death is part of the journey, but not the end of it. Easter is coming. As someone once laughingly told me, "If you want resurrection, first you have to die." Whenever my time comes my critter family has helped prepare my way. Mortality is real – mine and yours and everyone's.

Daniel Webster

March 14

I have always called talking about feelings 'important talk.' Knowing that our feelings are natural and normal for all of us can make it easier for us to share them with one another... The purpose of life is to listen - to yourself, to your neighbor, to your world and to God and, when the time comes, to respond in as helpful a way as you can find, from within and without.

Mr. Rogers

March 15

In a modern war, fought with modern weapons and on the modern scale, neither side can limit to "the enemy" the damage that it does. These wars damage the world. We know enough by now to know that you cannot damage a part of the world without damaging all of it. Modern war has not only made it impossible to kill "combatants" without killing "noncombatants," it has made it impossible to damage your enemy without damaging yourself.

Wendell Berry, from his essay, *The Failure of War*

March 16 - Purim begins at Sundown

God of the histories we tell,
God of the histories we don't:
on either side of a border,
a river, or a wall
you are there.
May we, in living out our faith,
never pretend that there is a way
to prove ourselves purer,
or more justified,
or holier
by separating ourselves from those
that you
will never stop loving.
Amen.

Prayer from the Corrymeela Community

March 17 - St. Patrick's Day

Remember that sometimes not getting what you want is a wonderful stroke of luck.

The Dalai Lama

March 18 - Full Moon

May we have hearts open to grace—
Ears primed for an Alleluia,
And eyes blessed with vision far beyond our own humble surroundings.

Bless our walking and our working and our waking
As we seek to build a beloved community
Grounded in acts of compassion,
Inspired for justice and
Filled with love and gratitude for a world (and a people) deep in need.

A blessing by Andy Bachmann

March 19

When I first moved to Florida from Seattle, it took a while to become calibrated to the subtleties of Florida's landscape. In the Pacific Northwest, changes in the landscape are big, obvious, and in-your-face. You can drive east on I-90 out of Seattle and experience several thousand feet of elevation gain, and associated change in forest types, in a few minutes.

In contrast, on one of my first trips into the field in Florida decades ago, an experienced and well-calibrated-to-Florida forester pointed across what appeared to be a table-flat clear cut at "that rise over there". He was referring to the perhaps 6 inches of elevation gain associated with a little hump in the field. And he was right, there were changes in soils and vegetation on that hump. I knew then I was in trouble.

Changes of season can be similarly subtle here, and they come at times that don't seem right for someone who grew up further north. Over the past few weeks, I've been seeing one of the first signs of spring in Florida – the reddish tinge in the treetops associated with the flowering and subsequent fruiting of red maple trees. In a few weeks, the understory shrubs and small trees will begin bursting their buds, pushing out tiny embryonic leaves. This produces an effect as you look across the forest that my friend Mike Ward calls "the green mist".

I've always looked at these weird February signs of Florida spring with a combination of gladness and trepidation. Gladness because spring is a beautiful and pleasant season most places, and trepidation because here spring is followed closely by the long misery of summer.

I'm going to stretch this into a metaphor for life, so please join me in prayer:

Dearest mover of the seasons.

Help us to become calibrated to the subtle signs of the seasons in our lives,
and to accept both the gladness and trepidation with an open heart,
knowing you will be with us through it all. Amen.



Words and photo by Tim Martin.
Tim took this photo of a Red Maple *Acer Rebrum* at Manatee Springs

March 20 - Spring begins

A Prayer for the Vernal Equinox by Andy Bachmann

A step forward.

Oh God, we cast a hopeful vision for our future. As our days stretch out like the limbs of a tree towards the long cast of the summer sun, we look past our fingertips to tomorrow, a tomorrow built on trust, in the confidence of camaraderie and rooted in our relationships to one another and to you.

We are a church of beautiful questions, unafraid to approach the unknown or the gray areas of our lives, where the *how's* and the *why's* are more prevalent than the *what's*, the *when's*, or the *where's*. We are courageous in our wanderings, optimistic that with each beautiful question that we ask, more truth and light will come to our sight, made more potent through our vulnerability with one another and ourselves.

Bless our forward movement. Bless our questioning hearts. Bless our dreams of tomorrow, that we might be more grateful in our today.

If it is balance that we seek, then today is our day. May we feel this brief moment of a celestial even keel, even as the wind and the waves of change push against us or propel us forward. May we be here today.



Painting by KK Halter

March 21

The present moment is all we have. Yes, we have plans and goals, a vision for tomorrow. But now is the only time we possess, and it is enough.

We can clear our mind of the residue of yesterday and clear our mind of fears of tomorrow. We can be present, now. We can make ourselves available to this moment, this day. It is by being fully present now that we reach the fulfillment of tomorrow.

Have no fear, child, a voice whispers. Have no regrets. Relinquish your resentments. Let Me take your pain. All you have is the present moment. Be still. Be here. Trust.

All you have is now. It is enough.

Melody Beattie, from *The Language of Letting Go*



March 22

Moments Between One Thing and Another

Notice the moments between one thing and another,
Soft, delicate shift between two things:

 The space between awake and asleep,
 Between a bud and a bloom,
When the sunrise becomes the day
and twilight the night ...
 The moment from unborn to first breath,
 The fleeting second from last breath to non-living
The inconspicuous moment when grief becomes a memory,
A child becomes an adult,
The face in the mirror, no long a reflection of your youth
 Simple moments – the last piece in a puzzle,
 The last sentence in a book, cold sheets on a winter's night
 Warming to just right.
When a kitten becomes a cat,
Brewing coffee's first sip,
When a friend's touch heals and simple words soothe
When sorrow becomes joy
And alone becomes connected.

Susan McLaughlin

March 23

Isaiah 58: 6-9

Is not this the fast that I choose?
To loose the bonds of injustice
To undo the thong of the yoke
To let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry?
And bring the homeless poor into your home?
When you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the morning,
Your healing shall spring forth speedily,
And your righteousness shall go before you;
The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
You shall cry, and God will say, 'Here I *am*.'

March 24

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy pear tree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. – Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

Gerard Manley Hopkins



Photo by Susan Cary

March 25

Ring the Bells that Still Can Ring ("Anthem" by Leonard Cohen)

*Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack, a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.
That's how the light gets in.*

Getting it perfectly right, while a noble goal, can be the biggest problem with any spiritual journey. It's become a cliché by now, but as Voltaire said, "Perfection is the enemy of good."

It seems that no matter what I choose as the goal of my Lenten journey, it inevitably recoils to bite me. When I choose to be more accepting and understanding of people who are difficult for me, the difficult suddenly show up in force. When I decide to simplify my life and live more peacefully for Lent, my schedule explodes with challenges that I will not and cannot ignore. And so it goes.

To travel the journey of Lent to Easter, which has all kinds of demands for commitment and belief, is to see and acknowledge the cracks in the bells we ring in our lives. That is one of the lessons of our Lenten theme, "Broken Heroes," for me. The brokenness of our heroes, while upsetting and sometimes even appalling, reminds me of their humanity. I'm unsure of how to process my discoveries of my heroes' flaws. Some are so great as to dethrone my heroes. Others simply remind me uncomfortably of myself.

Perhaps the inevitable failures of my Lenten promises are reminders to go ahead and challenge myself with a deeper commitment and spiritual practice, and then watch them suffer their own stress fractures. Many of the cracks in the bells of my life are of my own making. I am not as good as I think I am. But what else is there to do with those cracked bells but to ring them?

Larry Reimer

March 26

Try to imagine this formless, liquid abyss of many waters and surfaces. With and within this awesome, abysmal substance, God Mother creates universes.

We are made from this stuff, literally! And we literally live, move, and have our being in this fathomless, multi-dimensional matrix.

Stefan Emunds



Art by Ella Bittekoffer

March 27

I still believe in Santa, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy and true love. Don't even try to tell me different.

Dolly Parton

March 28

Silent Solidarity

We enter, one by one, to walk this sacred path

Mindful, deliberate, in silent solidarity

We navigate the winding way

One foot follows the other

Breathe, Breathe, Breathe

Walk, Walk, Walk

This journey through the labyrinth emulates life's odyssey

Twists, turns, curves

Sometimes straight, effortless

Sometimes meandering

Each turn leads to the center, welcoming

Along the way, opportunity to pause, listen, be alive

Breathe, Breathe, Breathe

Walk, Walk, Walk

We travel the path as silent companions

Holding space

Honoring the unique, spiritual, and sacred in each of us

Knowing that while we walk together

Ultimately, the journey is our own.

Heidi Franklin

March 29



Photo by John Harvey, taken on the Cinque Terra hiking trail in Italy

Hope It's True

I have a small grain of hope –
One small crystal that gleams
Clear colors out of transparency.

I need more.

I break off a fragment
To send to you. Please
Take this grain of hope
So mine won't shrink.

Please share your fragment,
So that yours may grow.
Only so, by division,
Will hope increase,
Like a clump of irises
Which will cease to flower
Unless you distribute
The clustered roots,
Unlikely source – clumsy
and earth covered – of grace.

Denise Levertov

March 30

Surface Pressure

I'm the strong one, I'm not nervous
I'm as tough as the crust of the earth is
I move mountains, I move churches
And I glow 'cause I know what my worth is
I don't ask how hard the work is
Got a rough indestructible surface
Diamonds and platinum, I find 'em, I flatten 'em
I take what I'm handed, I break what's demanding
But
Under the surface
I feel berserk as a tightrope walker in a three-ring circus
Under the surface
Was Hercules ever like "Yo, I don't wanna fight Cerberus"?
Under the surface
I'm pretty sure I'm worthless if I can't be of service
A flaw or a crack
The straw in the stack
That breaks the camel's back
What breaks the camel's back it's
Pressure like a drip, drip, drip that'll never stop, whoa
Pressure that'll tip, tip, tip 'till you just go pop, whoa
Give it to your sister, your sister's older
Give her all the heavy things we can't shoulder
Who am I if I can't run with the ball?
If I fall to
Pressure like a grip, grip, grip and it won't let go, whoa
Pressure like a tick, tick, tick 'til it's ready to blow, whoa
Give it to your sister, your sister's stronger
See if she can hang on a little longer
Who am I if I can't carry it all?
If I falter
Under the surface
I hide my nerves, and it worsens, I worry something is gonna hurt us
Under the surface
The ship doesn't swerve as it heard how big the iceberg is
Under the surface
I think about my purpose, can I somehow preserve this?
Line up the dominoes
A light wind blows

You try to stop it tumbling
But on and on it goes
But wait
If I could shake the crushing weight of expectations
Would that free some room up for joy
Or relaxation, or simple pleasure?
Instead we measure this growing pressure
Keeps growing, keep going
'Cause all we know is
Pressure like a drip, drip, drip that'll never stop, whoa
Pressure that'll tip, tip, tip 'til you just go pop, whoa-oh-oh
Give it to your sister, it doesn't hurt
And see if she can handle every family burden
Watch as she buckles and bends but never breaks
No mistakes just
Pressure like a grip, grip, grip and it won't let go, whoa
Pressure like a tick, tick, tick 'til it's ready to blow, whoa
Give it to your sister and never wonder
If the same pressure would've pulled you under
Who am I if I don't have what it takes?
No cracks, no breaks
No mistakes, no pressure

Lin Manuel Miranda

March 31

"I'm learning how important it is to make room for the stories of people whose experiences are different from mine, especially if they've been silenced, made to feel ashamed, or told their stories didn't matter."

Staci Frenes

April 1

They climbed on sketchy ladders towards God,
with winch and pulley hoisted hewn rock into heaven,
inhabited the sky with hammers,
defied gravity,
deified stone,
took up God's house to meet him,
and came down to their suppers
and small beer,
every night slept, lay with their smelly wives,
quarreled and cuffed the children,
lied, spat, sang, were happy, or unhappy,
and every day took to the ladders again,
impeded the rights of way of another summer's swallows,
grew greyer, shakier,
became less inclined to fix a neighbour's roof of a fine evening,
saw naves sprout arches, clerestories soar,
cursed the loud fancy glaziers for their luck,
somehow escaped the plague,
got rheumatism,
decided it was time to give it up,
to leave the spire to others,
stood in the crowd, well back from the vestments at the consecration,
envied the fat bishop his warm boots,
cocked a squint eye aloft,
and said, 'I bloody did that.'

John Ormond

April 2 – Ramadan begins at Sundown

Ramadan, also spelled Ramazan, Ramzan, Ramadhan or Ramathan, is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community.

The end of the Ramadan fast is celebrated as Eid al-Fitr, the “Feast of Fast-Breaking,” which is one of the two major religious holidays of the Muslim calendar (the other, Eid al-Adha, marks the end of the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims are expected to perform at least once in their lives if they are financially and physically able). In some communities Eid al-Fitr is quite elaborate: children wear new clothes, women dress in white, special pastries are baked, gifts are exchanged, the graves of relatives are visited, and people gather for family meals and to pray in mosques.

April 3

I am in love with every church
And mosque
And temple
And any kind of shrine
Because I know it is there
That people say the different names
Of the One God.

Hafiz

April 4



Interior of Rio Cathedral, Lois Macnamara

I believe in Christ, like I believe in the sun — not because I can see it, but by it I can see everything else.

C.S. Lewis

April 5

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A Poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

William Wordsworth

April 6

Life is amazing. And then it's awful. And then it's amazing again. And in between the amazing and awful it's ordinary and mundane and routine. Breathe in the amazing, hold on through the awful, and relax and exhale during the ordinary. That's just living heartbreaking, soul-healing, amazing, awful, ordinary life. And it's breathtakingly beautiful.



Photo by Susan Cary

April 7

Swifts

Spring comes little, a little. All April it rains.
The new leaves stick in their fists; new ferns still fiddleheads.
But one day the swifts are back. Face to the sun like a child
You shout, 'The swifts are back!'

Sure enough, bolt nocks bow to carry one sky-scyther
Two hundred miles an hour across fullblown windfields.
Swereeee swereeee. Another. And another.
It's the cut air falling in shrieks on our chimneys and roofs.

The next day, a fleet of high crosses cruises in ether.
These are the air pilgrims, pilots of air rivers.
But a shift of wing, and they're earth-skimmers, daggers
Skillful in guiding the throw of themselves away from themselves.

Quick flutter, a scimitar upsweep, out of danger of touch, for
Earth is forbidden to them, water's forbidden to them,
All air and fire, little owlsh ascetics, they outfly storms,
They rush to the pillars of altitude, the thermal fountains.

Here is a legend of swifts, a parable —
When the Great Raven bent over earth to create the birds,
The swifts were ungrateful. They were small muddy things
Like shoes, with long legs and short wings,

So they took themselves off to the mountains to sulk.
And they stayed there. 'Well,' said the Raven, after years of this,
'I will give you the sky. You can have the whole sky
On condition that you give up rest.'

'Yes, yes,' screamed the swifts, 'We abhor rest.
We detest the filth of growth, the sweat of sleep,
Soft nests in the wet fields, slimehold of worms.
Let us be free, be air!'

So the Raven took their legs and bound them into their bodies.
He bent their wings like boomerangs, honed them like knives.
He streamlined their feathers and stripped them of velvet.
Then he released them, *Never to Return*

Inscribed on their feet and wings. And so
We have swifts, though in reality, not parables but
Bolts in the world's need: swift

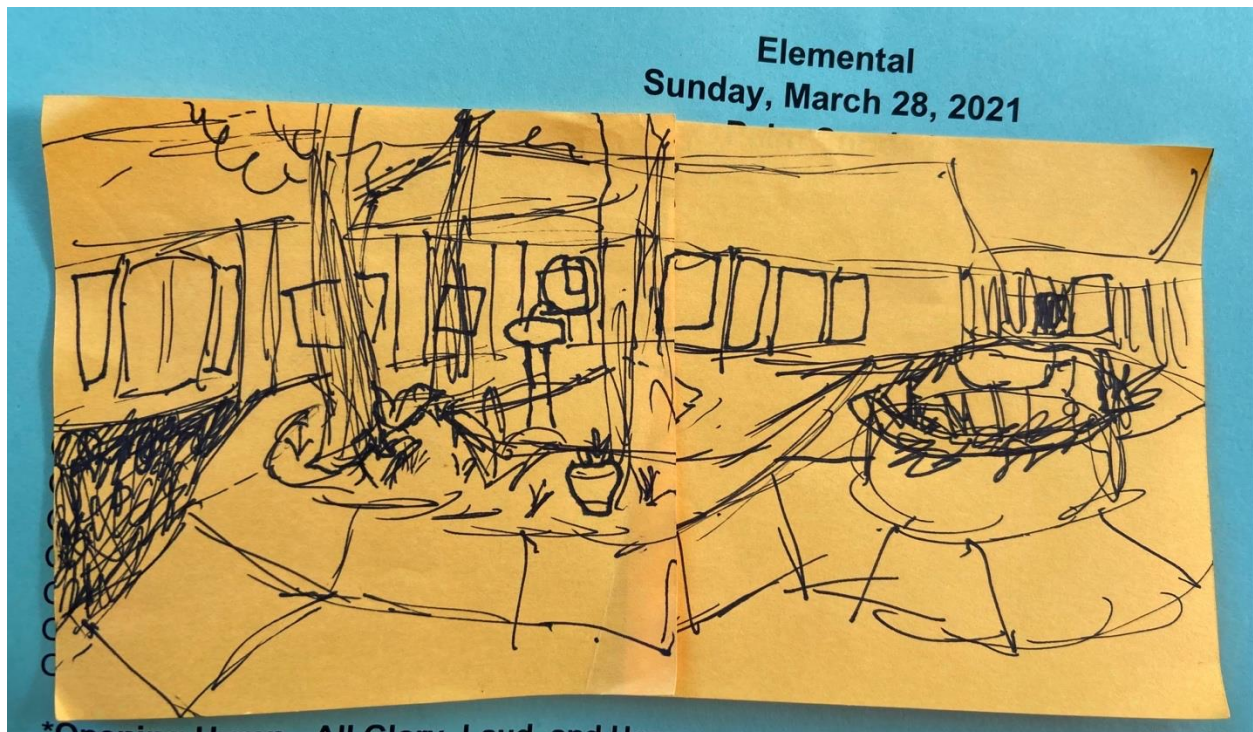
Swifts, not in punishment, not in ecstasy, simply
Sleepers over oceans in the mill of the world's breathing.
The grace to say they live in another firmament.
A way to say the miracle will not occur,
And watch the miracle.

Anne Stevenson

April 8

The harmony of the world is made manifest in Form and Number, and the heart and soul
and all the poetry of Natural Philosophy are embodied in the concept of athenatical
beauty.

D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson



UCG Courtyard Sketch by Ella Bittikoffer

April 9



Photo by Lois McNamara

April 10 – Palm Sunday

I write this on a day given to remembering the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem. This year the day seems empty and abstract. The events of the week are too overpowering. The knowledge that Christ's entry led directly to his Crucifixion looms too [grimly] ahead. This seems the strangest holiday of the year, a celebration of misunderstanding. In this world, the [kindom] has not yet come, though our hearts long for it and our lives incline toward it.

John Leax

April 11



Photo by Nel Webster

Every pain, addiction, anguish, longing, depression, anger or fear
is an orphaned part of us
seeking joy,
some disowned shadow
wanting to return
to the light
and home
of ourselves.

Jacob Nordby

April 12

The Jesus I learned of as a child was a Jesus of small boats, of fishing, of villages, of sunrises and sunsets, of storms, of nights under the stars, of wonder and of love. With years of theological training, I learned a broader, more cosmic Jesus, but I never let go of my earliest impressions.

Jesus to me, is more than a life, a history, but is a symbol, a shape of tender beauty. I have never been warmed by the dogmas, the delineation of divinity. What warmed me was, and is, what lit up that moment when I was twelve, as the one Gospel scene that has imprinted itself on my heart.

After the whirlpool of crises that had taken his disciples to and through the death of their beloved teacher, they returned to the lake where they had first met him. They went fishing and, after a long night, came up empty. Then a stranger on the shore told them to try once again, this time casting their nets in a different direction. They did, and they caught a full net.

Then they recognized him. When the boat was beached, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread warming. In words as mundane as words could ever be, Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast," and he gave them warm bread and fish.

The libraries of theology, the histories of churches, can add nothing that would enlarge those simple words: *Come, eat, warm yourselves by the fire. It's been a long night.*

Marv Hiles – the scripture story is from the Gospel of John 21: 1-13

April 13

Spy Wednesday

“It’s Spy Wednesday, the day the Church remembers how Judas agrees to betray Jesus. I learned of the tradition through my father, who worked in counter-intelligence for most of his career. I’m simultaneously too tired and too stressed to offer much coherence to this, but I do think about the work spies do. Much of it involves a betrayal of fundamental principles of decency which most of us learned early in life. What greater good could convince someone to sacrifice the ideals of honesty and truth-telling? Judas believed in Jesus, but he believed in something else more (and I don’t believe it was the money).

Much of the work a spy does is dangerous - to one’s life, but also to one’s sense of self and goodness. It’s hardly a surprise that Judas died by suicide. The conflict in his values must have been overwhelming, and he had no one he could talk to about it. If he’d lived to Sunday, what might he have experienced?

Tonight, maybe, in the midst of our expansive compassion for those who have been harmed in this world, spare just a drop of compassion for Judas, and for the humanity within every spy. Include in your prayers those who have known moral injury and borne the weight of this internal conflict.”

Rev. Elizabeth Dilley, Minister and Team Leader for the
Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization
Ministry team in the national setting of the UCC

April 14 Maundy Thursday

Near the end of the Lenten season, we remember the last night Jesus spent with his disciples, sharing a meal. This remembrance constitutes one of the earliest and most universal of Christian practices, holy communion. Its meanings are many: in it, we might detect the presence of God, be united with one another, or remember the ways in which Jesus lived and healed and taught. We might recall the holy mystery, in which love leads through betrayal and fear and even death, to new life.

Today, receive the gifts of bread and cup. The bread is broken off from one loaf, a reminder that we are all bound up in one another, that we are all a part of the body of God in the world. Each cup reminds us of the life that flows in each of us, the life that unites us, the life that calls us forward into eternal love. Everyone is invited to receive.

***This is the bread of life. It is broken and shared. May it nourish you.
This is the cup of love. It is freely given to you. May it sustain you and
replenish your hope.
May what is broken transform in you, transform you.***

Bromleigh McCleneghan

April 15 Good Friday – Passover begins at sundown



Photo by Susan Cary

There is a sadness that settles
When the last one leaves

The door shushes your last goodbye
And then
Quiet.

Where do I listen in the quiet, when all I want
Is to call out your name?

Can you come again? One last refrain?
A few more goodbyes? Another I love you?

The burden of your passing has
Placed a weight on the top left lobe of my lung,
Bearing down with the gravity of the soul,
Your soul,
Now settled inside my heart,
Now and forever more. Amen.

Andy Bachmann

April 16 Full Moon

"Imperatives"

Look at the birds
Consider the lilies
Drink ye all of it

Ask'
Seek
Knock

Enter by the narrow gate
Do not be anxious
Judge not
Go: be it done for you

Do not be afraid
Arise, I say, arise
Stretch out your hand
Stand up
Be still
Rise

Let us be going
Love
Forgive
Remember me

Kathleen Norris

April 17 Easter Sunday

To us, the world had ended (or so it seemed)
Yet in the quietest dawn
After the tumults of our hearts had turned
So topsy-turvy that we knew no way
was up, no say could be said to
bring the sourness of sadness
the bitterness of betrayal
Out of our souls felt irrevocably stained
By the ways in which the world had so turned
towards despair,
the crash of hope so broken in so many
irreplaceable pieces on the ground
There was no point in even opening our eyes (or so it seemed)

There was a sound
A whisper of sorts
Barely heard on the stars of the night
(as if the whisper itself had brought the first hints of dawn)
Calling across the waters and the waves
Calling from the hilltops and the valleys
Calling from the graves of our beloveds
And calling from the place just behind the place
That held our despair in our hearts so desperately-

The sound beyond all sound that simply sounded
The word, the one Word that could mend it all
And make it all right, make it alright, make it. Alright?
And so it did. And so it does. And so it seems
That we will be.
All right.

(alleluia. alleluia. alleluia. Amen.)

Andy Bachmann



Photo by Nel Webster
Nel saw the red cross appear after she took this photo.

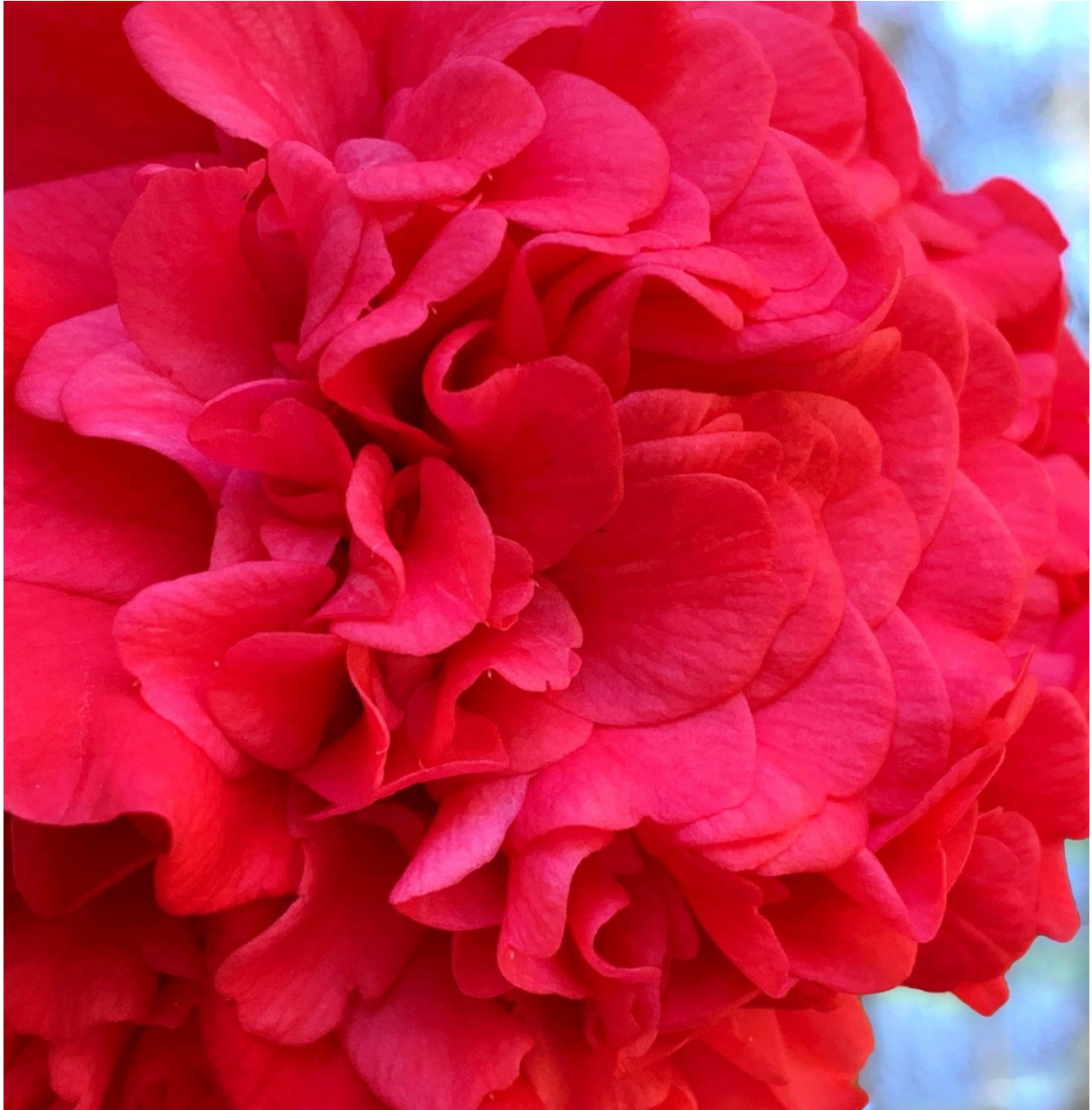


Photo by Barbara Gibbs

Happy Easter! May you find joy in the coming Spring season – warmth, sunshine, renewal, and the love of the Spirit.

Thank you to everyone who made this devotional possible, with your beautiful written word, visual art, and loving support.

Cover photo by Barb Gibbs

