

A scenic landscape featuring a calm lake in the foreground, reflecting the sky and surrounding terrain. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a sky with soft, wispy clouds. A large, smooth, dark rock is positioned in the lower right foreground, partially submerged in the water. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, greens, and earthy tones.

# EMBRACING THE WHOLENESS OF CREATION: A LENTEN JOURNEY OF RESTORATION & CONNECTION

Lenten Meditations 2023



## Ash Wednesday

### February 22

*“Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, ‘You are not also one of his disciples, are you?’ He denied it and said, ‘I am not.’”*

~John 18:25

### Reflection

It was easy for Peter to pledge his faithfulness when it cost nothing, when he was safe with Jesus. But Peter could not find his voice nor display any courage when confronted with the world’s determination to hate and persecute. Some think discipleship simply states to the world that we are Christians or disciples. Others think discipleship is all about what we do within the walls of the church. Especially during the season of Lent, we may be tempted to believe discipleship is solely about how we master the disciplines of fasting and praying. Looked at this way, I think discipleship is easy when lived out in the safety and security of these four walls. Discipleship is easy when we don’t have to disrupt our lives or risk our own physical and material abundance.

The world interrogates us daily, asking us if we are disciples of Jesus. Many of us have learned how to answer in the affirmative. It is easy to say, “Yes, I am a disciple.” But the question for us now is: Are we willing to stand in solidarity with those the world continues to oppress and persecute? Are we willing to risk our comfort to see a more just and equal world for all God’s children? I know Jesus is a hard act to follow, but the Holy Spirit is there to guide us in all truth.

### Prayer

During this season of Lent, may we lean into our calling and identities as disciples, finding our voice to confront oppression, domination, and exploitation, and empowered to be the change we desire. May it be so.

**February 23****Don't Worry, Child**

*So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

~Matthew 6:34

**Reflection**

Psychiatrists and psychologists have identified anxiety—unease, nervousness, and apprehension about the future—as one of those conditions increasingly afflicting people all over the world. Everything is moving and growing so fast that we are having trouble controlling and predicting our fates, making us uneasy and worried. We all know the feelings of worry, uneasiness, and apprehension about life, whether we will have enough, or what tomorrow brings. It is not easy to hear Jesus tell us not to worry when we must look after our daily needs for food, clothes, and shelter. But Jesus lays out a choice between living the good life and living a good one. Those pursuing the good life risk failing to live a good life if money, wealth, and possessions are the focus of their existence.

Jesus' assurance is that God's care and provision know no bounds. There is no prosperity to be gained from having the right kind or the right amount of faith. Throughout the hard times and the unpredictability of life, it is a comforting assurance to embrace that if God takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, surely God will take care of us. As we embark on this journey through the season of Lent, we have an opportunity to look honestly at our lives and see where we may have allowed the pursuit of the good life to make us less concerned about living a good life, a life centered around Divine love and beloved community rather than personal and material gain. There will be no need to worry. We will be full of life now.

**Prayer**

Merciful One, empower us with faith and hope that we may stand firm in the face of fear, worry, and anxiety.

## February 24

*“Comfort, oh comfort my people,” says your God.*

*“Speak softly and tenderly to Jerusalem.”*

~Isaiah 40:1-2

### Reflection

Where do you find and how do you know comfort? The answer may not come readily. Many of us have not thought about what gives us comfort or brings us solace when we are hurting. Perhaps it is the companionship of a loved one or a lovely square of chocolate enjoyed slowly, or a hot cup of tea. For others it is the ability to take a walk outside in the beauty of nature, or spending time with a beloved hobby or sport. Nothing is trite when it comes to comfort. Rather, it is about recognizing what makes us feel better. This is particularly important when we are going through a period of struggle and despair, when all we can bear is someone speaking softly and tenderly to us.

Give some thought today about how you know comfort in this time. What is “holding out its gifts in each compassionate hand?”

### Solace Blessing

That’s it.

That’s all this blessing  
knows how to do:

Shine your shoes.

Fill your refrigerator.

Water your plants.

Make some soup.

All the things  
you cannot think  
to do yourself  
when the world  
has come apart,  
when nothing  
will be normal  
again.

Somehow  
this blessing knows  
precisely what you need,  
even before  
you know.

It sees what will bring  
the deepest solace  
for you.  
It senses what will offer  
the kindest grace.

And so it will step  
with such quietness  
into the ordinary moments  
where the absence  
is the deepest.

It will enter  
with such tenderness  
into the hours  
where the sorrow  
is most keen.

You do not even  
have to ask.

Just leave it open—  
your door,  
your heart,  
your day  
in every aching moment  
it holds.

See what solace  
spills through the gaps  
your sorrow has torn.

See what comfort  
comes to visit,  
holding out its gifts  
in each compassionate  
hand.

~Jan Richardson  
from *The Cure for Sorrow*

## February 25

*“Unlike every other assembly of people, unlike every other institution surrounding the churches to whom [the Apostle] Paul wrote, the hierarchies and social relations that prevail in the world give way to one body in Christ in the confines of the church. In a word, the church is different. It’s different in here.”*

~Rev DeWayne Davis, in a November 14, 2021 sermon

### Reflection

In my first visit to Plymouth in 2018, I noticed immediately that God was not referred to with a gendered pronoun. God, here, was too big to have gender. It was different in here.

Countless times since that day, I’ve taken careful note of the language we use to talk about our shared values and the language we use to express (and sometimes celebrate) the large variations in our beliefs. There is no creed, because it’s different in here.

I was contentedly unchurched for 30 years, but after one visit to Plymouth I was open, and after half a dozen more, I was home. Because it’s different in here.

### Prayer

Dear God, may my gratitude for your protection and guidance be as infinite as you are. Thank you for bringing me to Plymouth. Thank you for making it (and keeping it) different in here. Amen.

**February 27**

*The birds they sang*

*At the break of day*

*Start again*

*I heard them say*

*Don't dwell on what has passed away*

*Or what is yet to be . . .*

*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 . . .*

~From "Anthem," a song by Leonard Cohen

**Reflection**

We can learn from the birds. They sing as they start each day without dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. We humans strive for perfection without realizing there is a crack in everything. These cracks let the light in so we can see glimpses of why we are here.

**Prayer**

God, help us start each day without dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Help us understand that there is no "perfect offering" and that it is our imperfections that let your light in to help us see what we can be.



## February 28

*“No one is illegal on stolen land.”*

~quote on a t-shirt

### Reflection

Think about that. White people, who stole the land, accuse immigrants of being illegally on the land, when they (we) are the ones who are illegally here. What right do we have to accuse others? Since this isn't our land, what rights do we have at all? Maybe the rights we actually have are the rights of guests, of visitors, and our whole legal system is a sham. What right do we have to accord ourselves rights? Who made us God? We did. But if we can do that, we can undo it. It may be the hardest undoing in history. How do we even begin?

Go back to the quote. If no one is illegal, then we are not illegal either. It's kind of like unconditional love. God's love is so vast, it can encompass even us, unworthy as we are. One small step would be to allow refugees at the border to enter. A delicious irony, since many at the border are Native Americans: We who stole the land would open it back up to (at least some of) its original inhabitants. Seems like a kind of divine justice. Or at least a step in a right direction.

### Prayer

God guide our steps. Make them small and meaningful, not harming others, actually helping others share the life you want for us all. Make our steps thoughtful and peaceful and loving.

## March 1

*“Some religions act like God listens only to classical music. Some religions act like God needs gospel music to wake up in the morning. Personally, I think God’s got a soft spot for Tammy Wynette, and the Holy Ghost likes the Beatles. Needless to say, God lets us pick up our own soundtrack and then just sort of hums along.”*

~from *God Is No Laughing Matter* by Julia Cameron

### Reflection

It’s easy for us to limit God to our own personal playlists. We define God as we experience God, ignoring the fact that God is so expansive that no soundtrack can reflect all that God is. The bigger problem is when we contend that our playlist is the only one God prefers. We wall out perspectives and experiences of God that might add depth and nuance to our faith expressions. How much richer our lives would be if we gave God more room to dance with all of God’s people!

### Prayer

Musical God, help us to open the ears of our hearts to all that you are in this wide universe—and thank you for giving us Motown. Amen.

## March 2

*“Nothing beats kindness,” said the horse. “It sits quietly beyond all things.”*

~Charlie Mackesy, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, 2019

### Reflection

I arrived at 2:00 am. My brother had been in a coma for two days. I told him I loved him and that he didn't need to keep fighting to live for my sake. Within a few minutes he was gone. The hospice nurse, with 40 years of experience, said, “He was waiting for you.” I didn't understand that: Could my words possibly have that much power?

No one can really know. Since then, several people have told me similar stories. It makes me wonder, though, how often in life do we have an important impact (positive or negative) without ever knowing it?

Maybe you said “hi” to a stranger and it really brightened the person's day. Maybe you made it a point to tell a server that she did a really good job, and she hadn't received a real genuine compliment in days. Maybe you told an angry, self-absorbed teenager that you understood him and loved him, and your words helped the teenager keep from making a really bad choice.

I don't know, for sure, the impact I had on my brother, and we often don't know what kind of an impact we are having as we go through our daily living. Maybe though, we can learn to be more conscious of how we are conducting ourselves and strive to be one who has a good impact on others most of the time.

### Prayer

Dear God, help me to be more aware of my actions. Help me to realize that I can, by even the simplest interactions, be a force for good in life.

**March 3**

*“There is a deep beauty in not averting our gaze. No matter how hard it is, no matter how heartbreaking it can be. It is about presence. It is about bearing witness.”*

~Terry Tempest Williams

**Reflection**

These words challenged me to expand my understanding of “deep beauty.” For me, in this passage, beauty becomes holiness. Seeing, feeling and being witness to all of life becomes a daily (moment by moment) practice. When I assume this posture, all is holy. And I can be changed.

**Prayer**

Sacred Presence, may I bear witness to all in my path, honor the holy in all, and respond in grace and compassion. Let me be open to transformation.

## March 4

*“You can’t get over things you do to other people as easily as you get over things they do to you.”*

~from *The Sentence* by Louise Erdrich

### Reflection

I sat on the guilt for decades. I knew I could have (should have) done more for her when she asked for help, that my assistance was meager at best, and that the little I had done had still left her in a vulnerable position. Whenever the memory arose, I tamped it down, only to have it poke its way up like a persistent weed. Years later I apologized to her for not having stayed with her that night. “Oh, I don’t remember it that way,” she said. Her recollection was that I *had* been there for her. I was not the disappointment I had imagined myself to be.

While forgiving others can be hard sometimes, forgiving ourselves can be a greater challenge. Our expectation of self-perfection clouds the reality—and even the beauty—of our fallibility. While we are human and often mess up, we still deserve love, especially our own.

### Prayer

Forgiving, loving God, may we own our fallibility and our mistakes, but may they not own us. Amen.

## March 6

*The number*

*of hours  
we have  
together is  
actually not  
so large.*

*Please linger  
near the  
door*

*uncomfortably  
instead of  
just leaving.*

*Please forget  
your scarf  
in my  
life and  
come back  
later for  
it.*

~Excerpted from “*For M*” by Mikko Harvey

### Reflection

In Minnesota, lingering near the door is not an uncomfortable thing but a way of life. A true Minnesotan does not leave seeing friends, family member, or loved ones until at least an hour after they begin the process of saying goodbye.

So many of us hope that people will linger longer, that a scarf will get forgotten, that a return will happen. But too often we are frightened to ask for these things. How different would it be if we let people know that it isn't a burden for us to host them longer, for us to welcome them back in, for them to stay in our hearts and our lives.

For truly, the number of hours in our lives is never large enough to adequately share with those we love how much we love them.

### Prayer

Expansive abundant God, let us linger in the doorways for a bit longer, and when we return, let us be welcome back with love. Amen.

## March 7

*“In the midst of death, life persists. In the midst of untruth, truth persists. In the midst of darkness, light persists.”*

~Mahatma Gandhi

### Reflection

We seem to have inherited a culture of absolutes. This IS that. I AM this. You ARE that. We ARE NOT that. This seems far too simplistic for the complexity of our humanness. We are capable of holding contradictory and paradoxical viewpoints and emotions.

Gandhi reminds us that even in the places that seem most absolute—death, truth and darkness—the possibility of the opposite persists. In the season of Lent, we follow Jesus to the capital punishment, torture device of the cross. We also are witness to the life and actions along that path. We become witness to an awful death. Then we become witness to the rebirth/resurrection/restoration of Easter. “In the midst of death, life persists...”

### Prayer

Loving and paradoxical God, hold us gently in your never-ending care as we travel the cycles of life, death and rebirth. Help us to be bold and loving along the way. Amen.

## March 8

*When asked, what is the thing that brings you the most joy right now, here are the responses of our young people in late middle and high school:*

*I have a nice community that I really love and brings me joy every day*

*Fencing and my septum piercing*

*Whales*

*Music*

*Wanting a car and not being able to afford it...yet!*

*Three cats*

*Drifting in parking lots*

*My beautiful sister*

*I really love my friends and I feel really known in my school*

*Finding a lot of new music*

*Passing my permit test on the first try*

*Painting*

*Doing things that help others, and give me a chance to be a leader*

*Musicals*

## Reflection

As you go about your day, what are the things that bring you immediate joy? Are there ways you can be a joy sparkler to those around you?

## Prayer

God of septum piercings and whales,  
 Help us all find joy in being known, in freedom, in creativity,  
 in self-expression and in community.  
 May we live as heart-forward as the young people in our  
 lives. Amen.



## March 9

*“We shall not cease from exploration,” T. S. Eliot wrote, “And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”*

### Reflection

My husband loved T.S. Eliot’s Four Quartets, and through him, I slowly began to appreciate it—and in particular, the words above from the Fourth Quartet called Little Gidding. There is a certainty that we will explore, try new things, and also there’s the realization that our expanding horizons in a sense will bathe our starting point in new light, new understanding. The words seem to hold a gift, an invitation, to go and live, explore, find new paths. Yet they remind us that coming back to the starting point is also a gift. Our exploration gives us a new perspective. In one way, we are returning to ourselves, to our starting point and seeing both as they were and as they are now, anew.

For me, what I was sure I knew to be true was turned on its heels with new insight. My family story changed, my know-all about long-time friends expanded and partly dissolved. The feeling and assurance of *How It Should Be* faded. Even my spiritual life changed along with how I saw myself. I am so grateful. It has meant a new way of being with old and new friends, old and new experiences, and with myself.

### Prayer

May we all come home and to ourselves in rich and loving ways. May each of us find we are more a friend to ourselves and others than used to be the case. May we be more at ease, more comfortable with truth and more open to new ideas.

**March 10**

*“It’s just a little fantasy. A stranger comes up to me on the street, shakes my hand, smiles, and says, ‘Thanks for being here. Without you the world would be a poorer place.’”*

~from a cartoon by Jean-Jacques Sempé

**Reflection**

He left the church as abruptly as he seemed to have arrived. I think he was a Drop In Center participant, although I knew little about his life. It was hard for me to understand his speech, so I didn’t pursue conversations with him. All I knew is that he stood at the left-hand door of the narthex and handed out worship service bulletins. We considered him an Honorary Steward and were glad to have him with us.

And then one day he stopped coming. We wondered if someone said something that hurt his feelings, but there was no way to find out. He was gone, and we are a poorer church for it.

The fragility of welcome reminds us that God shows up in the most unlikely people. May we delight in the stranger, being thankful for the richness they bring to our community.

**Prayer**

God of Welcome, may we welcome and embrace all who enter our community, trusting that they have something to teach us about their goodness and your love. Amen.

**March 11**

*“Be still and know that I am God...”*

~Psalm 46:10a

**Reflection**

The imperative in this introductory portion of Psalm 46, is actually an invitation to “cease and desist” from the frenetic pace of life that so easily overwhelms us.

Lent serves as a counter-intuitive opportunity to simply BE STILL!, and in that time of quiet, to ponder the mystery and the majesty of God who exists around us and in us!

Listen to the words of your heart as you “practice the presence of God,” which is an appropriate definition of prayer. We are unable to hear the voice of the Divine within us if we are clamoring, conspiring, conniving or complaining.

BE STILL: Pay attention to the voice of the Holy One speaking with you and around you during this contemplative season!

**Prayer**

Gracious Holy One, enable us to quell the clamoring “shoulds” and “musts” of our lives, so that we are more able to be attuned and attentive to your voice of love, grace, forgiveness, and peace. Amen.

## March 13

*“...guys have underestimated me my entire life. And for years, I never understood why. It used to really bother me. But then one day, I was driving my little boy to school and I saw this quote by Walt Whitman, and it was painted on the wall there. It said, ‘Be curious, not judgmental.’ I like that.”*

~Ted Lasso, in the famous [darts scene](#) from the hit TV show.

### Reflection

Matthew’s Gospel in Eugene Peterson’s version of the New Testament leaves little to interpret in Jesus’ thoughts about judgement. At the start of the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter, Jesus says, “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment.”

Scripture tells us that Jesus spent a lot of time teaching tough lessons like that—stuff that’s difficult for me to do, with all my daily judgements.

What about you?

### Prayer

God, as I age, please help me be a lot more curious and a lot less judgmental. And please help me find the right ways to influence others in that direction as well. Thank you.

## March 14

*“Water under snow is weary, under ice it stretches sleeping.  
Winds are blowing, no rest for them...”*

~Harri Weismann, Finnish composer, from “Vesi Väsy  
Lumen” (Water Weary Under Snow).

### Reflection

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to hear this beautiful piece sung by the St. Olaf Choir. That beautiful and somewhat haunting verse reminds me of another poem given to me by my dear aunt. She wrote it years ago when she was attending college.

“The tracks across the pasture’s waste were mine.  
I, alone, moved in all the snow’s white stillness.  
This is death!  
The thought brought chill,  
not of winter’s cold.  
Then, there, beneath a patch of wind scoured brook,  
I saw little green plants waving at the currant’s pull.  
Warmed, I laughed at winter’s masquerade...  
and glimpsed the resurrection through a pane of ice.”

### Prayer

During this time of lent, let’s not forget to look through the pane of ice before us.

**March 15**

*Everybody is wonderin' what and where they all came from  
Everybody is worryin' 'bout where they're gonna go  
When the whole thing's done  
But nobody knows for certain  
And so it's all the same to me  
I think I'll just let the mystery be.*

~From the song "Let the Mystery Be" by Iris DeMent

**Reflection**

I have said goodbye and amen to quite a few people in the last five years. I think: Where are they? Will I ever see them again? Will I be following soon? Should I have bought so many paper towels from Costco? I wring my hands frantically, and then I turn to music. Songs like Iris DeMent's "Let the Mystery Be" help me to center again and find peace and embrace not knowing every little thing.

**Prayer**

God of our spirits, God with no timeline, help me hold on to mystery and not to try to turn to the last chapter. And thanks for music, by the way.

**March 16**

*On a late January day, 2022, my husband Doug underwent seven hours of back surgery. P.T. followed. Plans for returning home were shattered by another fall. A broken hip needed surgery and more P.T. Nights later I was notified again. Doug had been rushed to Hospital Emergency, extremely ill with sepsis. Arriving at Emergency, I saw Doug's labored breathing. I watched doctors and nurses, among so much medical equipment, care for Doug. I felt cold with tension, but my faith kept me chanting quietly, Breathe and Trust, Breathe and Trust. Hours later Doug was moved to the ICU. Instruments were put down Doug's throat, to examine. Doctors found a bleeding ulcer. Closure did not hold. Doctors kept him sedated and quiet until 7 PM. They tried again to close the bleeding ulcer. This time it held! The doctors asked me to reassure Doug he would be fine. I would return in the morning. I left for home.*

*In the following days, Doug slowly gained strength, took tiny steps. We both felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Everything took time. As Doug improved, I had a chance to think about a few things beyond being at his side. One afternoon I went to an art exhibit. I relaxed looking around, as I was drawn to a watercolor awash in pastel shades of color. A few more steps, and I was startled to realize that the name the artist, Mary Zillmann, had given the painting was Breathe and Trust! How could this be? This was the mantra I had whispered to God, and to my husband, over and over as I sat in the cold, sterile Emergency Room, praying God would restore my husband's precious life. Slowly, he took tiny steps with so much P.T. On Maundy Thursday, 2022, Doug returned to our home! Breathe and Trust in the Lord, for God shall walk with you as you believe in God's almighty power of health to renewal. The artist caught my thoughts in her brush of delicate colors where light swept across the firmament of sky and water, connecting with a distant shore,*

*where humanity resides on God's earth. Trusting, Breathing, these heavenly nuances of light, I had renewed feeling in my being, to recognize the miracle, the power of life, moving, healing, resurrected, Easter Morn. Christ is Risen! Hallelujah!*

### **Reflection**

When was the last time you noticed the hand of the Divine in your own life? What were the small signs—or the big signs—that God was with you, guiding, guarding, and protecting you, in every moment of your experience?

### **Prayer**

Dear God, as we move through these hours and days of Lent, may we be prepared physically and spiritually for the dawn of Easter, coming with the trust and breath God gives Christians to believe in the sacred power of the risen Christ.



**March 17**

*“Much of my spiritual life is spent waiting expectantly for the Spirit to make itself known. I realize now that I am waiting not for God’s work in me, which has already happened, but for my own response.”*

~Parker Palmer

**Reflection**

I worry sometimes that I’m not doing enough. Our world is so fragile, with climate change, violence, poverty, and oppression overwhelming our efforts and sapping our souls. I make a donation and wonder if I should have sent more. I write to a legislator and worry that my words are inadequate. I join a committee or a cause and fear that we’ll get mired in meetings with no significant outcomes. I need to remember that any action, no matter how small, really does matter, especially since others are also taking action. Together we can make a difference. If truly I listen for the voice of God and follow God’s lead, my response will be enough.

**Prayer**

God of Action, help me to follow your lead and trust that my response will honor your intention. Amen.

**March 18**

*“Even when the cloud is not there, it continues as snow or rain. It is impossible for a cloud to die. It can become rain or ice, but it cannot become nothing. The cloud does not need to have a soul in order to continue. There’s no beginning and no end.”*

~From the poem “I Am Not in Here” (2016) by Thich Nhat Hanh

**Reflection**

I was struck by the beautiful image of clouds having no beginning and no end. When I read this short passage I thought, clouds are like souls, and as I understand souls, they have no beginning and no end. Today we are a cloud, tomorrow rain, perhaps later a water vapor—but never are we nothing.

**Prayer**

Heavenly One, help me see that clouds, like your love, never die. Let us look for your love in the clouds, the snow, the ice, the rain as well as in the brilliant sunshine as spring approaches.

## March 20

*“Every day  
I see or hear  
something  
that more or less*

*kills me  
with delight,  
that leaves me  
like a needle*

*in the haystack  
of light.’*

~From [“Mindful” \(2004\) by American poet Mary Oliver.](#)

### Reflection

When I first read and reflected on this poem I was struck by the image of seeing or hearing something every day that “killed me with delight.” What a sense of awareness the poet must have, and what a challenge to us to pay attention to the world around us. As I return to this piece, I see myself as that needle with God’s light shining on me, and *that* “kills me with delight.” I love the image of being a needle, lost in a haystack but somehow being found by the light—God’s light—shining on me.

### Prayer

God, just as your loving light seeks us out, help us shed our own loving light on our fellow needles in the haystack. Let us discover one another in your shining light.

**March 21**

*This is our calling—co-creation. Every single one of us, without exception, is called to co-create with God. No one is too unimportant to have a share in the making or unmaking of the final shining-forth. Everything that we do either draws the Kingdom of love closer, or pushes it further off.*

~Madeleine L'Engle, *And It Was Good, Reflections on Beginnings*

**Reflection**

I find this a powerful piece. It's certainly good news that "every single one of us" is an active co-creator with God. But with that comes a big responsibility. That last sentence sends us off with a real challenge as "everything we do" can bring us closer to the Kingdom of Love—or it pushes it further away.

**Prayer**

Lord, help us co-create with you, bringing us all closer to your love. Help us see the opportunities every day for us to draw together. Let us not push away but be aware of all the ways we can gather together to co-create your beloved community.

**March 22**

*A conversation can be a contest, or a game of catch with invisible balloons. You toss a phrase, and understanding blooms like an anemone of colored lights. My mind fireworks with unasked questions. Who is this miracle speaking to me? And who is this miracle listening? What amazingness are we creating? How can I not listen generously?*

~from [“Generous Listening” by Marilyn Nelson](#)

**Reflection**

In my family (as is probably true in so many), conversation can become a competition. We spar to see who can demonstrate the greatest wit, wisdom, or knowledge, often waiting impatiently for the next entry point when someone else in the contest holds the conversation balloon. Even when we all agree about a particular political issue or bit of family lore, we're reluctant to concede the space. Our sentences become endless strings of conjunctions with no periods.

How much richer would our conversations be if we welcomed curiosity into the room? What might we learn if we practiced WAIT—Why Am I Talking? What might we learn about ourselves as well as about the others whose voices have graced our communion?

**Prayer**

Spirit of Generous Listening, help us to open our hearts and our ears—and not always our mouths—so that we can create amazingness. May we make it so.

## March 23

*“In the months following [the former president’s] attempted coup, as in the post-Civil War era, we must ask who benefits when harm is swept under the rug and whose interests are even further marginalized when that happens. And the next time unity and forgiveness are used as keywords during a time of great national tension, we must again stop and ask: Unity at the expense of whose justice? Forgiveness without demanding what repentance?”*

~Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg in the book *On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World*

### Reflection

Calls for compromise, peace, and unity all sound very good without context. Reasonable people compromise; they want peace and unity. But in a social justice context, we must look very carefully at those calls for compromise, peace, and unity. Do the people calling for those things have a hidden agenda? Or perhaps their motives are well-meaning, and they just haven’t considered the implications.

When the people who sew chaos call for calm, take a deep breath and think critically about what’s being requested and why. Perhaps it’s our privilege that allows us to forgive everything—to free ourselves from our resentments and move on—no matter what injustice continues because we’ve simply forgiven it.

### Prayer

Dear God, grant us all the wisdom to repent when we are wrong and repair when we have caused harm. Help us to recognize the harms we are still doing, and to stop doing them. Amen.

## March 24

*This is what you shall do:*

*Love the earth and sun and the animals;*

*Give alms to everyone that asks;*

*Stand up for the forgotten and dismissed;*

*Devote your income and labor to others;*

*Hate tyrants;*

*Argue not concerning God;*

*Have patience and indulgence toward the people,*

*And your very flesh shall become a great poem.*

~Walt Whitman

### Reflection

The notion of my becoming a “great poem,” after the fashion of Mr. Whitman, is an ongoing challenge. Poetry is not always linear (I certainly am not). It does not always make sense (I certainly don’t).

But good poetry does attempt to make meaning of the human condition. Its art adds something to the sum of the whole and maybe a little bit more. Poetry is sometimes simple in its form, but not always easy in its function.

Whitman’s idea of “becoming a great poem” is straightforward, but it is often a challenge to live into...to “become.” I do best with that when I remember that God is the author of the “great poem,” and I am God’s partner in giving it life.

### Prayer

God of life, may we have the intention, grace, patience and courage to live out what makes our lives the great poem that you have written for us. And may we be gentle and forgiving with ourselves when we don’t. Amen

## March 25

In a sermon Beth Hoffman Faeth gave on November 7, 2021, she said,

*“We are on the edge of something new. We cannot have lived through what we have just endured in order for things to stay the same. Trying to recreate that which made us church before March of 2020 will both disappoint and discourage us. Haggai’s call to the Israelites is his call to us . . . the time is now to build. The time is now to stretch into a new way of community. The time is now to be the church we have only dreamt of before. In order to do this, we must leave our paneled houses—literally and figuratively—and trust that God holds the future, inviting us into community we have only dared to imagine.*”

And finally,

*“What kind of temple will we build, Plymouth? What Church will we be?”*

### Reflection

We’re still answering that question, whether we’re concentrating on that call to action or not. We decide what kind of church we are with every action we take or fail to take. We all have our habits and routines. Sometimes we work on leaving them behind, and sometimes we just keep going as we were.

But Beth was right: We cannot have lived through what we have just endured in order for things to stay the same.

When new ideas are brought forward for new ways to be in community at Plymouth, welcome the possibility in them. Ask questions; offer your thoughts. Take an active part of building a new Plymouth.

### Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the work of every board, initiative, and committee at Plymouth. Please guide their work and help us all to find new ways to nurture each other, support the community, and welcome the stranger at Plymouth.



## March 27

*“We can never know beforehand how God’s image should appear in others. That image always manifests a completely new and unique form that comes solely from God’s free and sovereign creation . . . We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. The Church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants.”*

~from *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

### Reflection

We’ve probably all heard it: “We make plans, and God laughs.” It’s really annoying. I have a calendar on which I faithfully track all of my meetings, events, responsibilities, and reminders. It’s very neat and predictable—until life happens. There’s an illness, a home disaster, a car breakdown, an unexpected (unwelcome?) visitor, or bad weather that upends my plans and sends me scrambling to readjust.

How might God be showing up in those moments? How might the interruption be an opportunity for me to see the goodness in what feels like disorder? How might I use my canceled plans to be a faithful servant to whomever needs me in that unsettled time? Whose claims and petitions might need my attention and response?

### Prayer

Creative and Loving Presence, help me to sense your presence in the midst of my irritation over disrupted plans. Show me how each moment has meaning. Amen.

**March 28**

*“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”*

~Genesis 1:1-3

**Reflection**

In her book, *On the Mystery*, theologian Catherine Keller mines the depths of the first Christian creation story. She writes, “The first chapter of Genesis can be locked down as a report on the absolute origin from nothing. It can be locked out as mere prescientific ignorance. But what if instead we open it up, almost like a parable, to suggest unexpected meanings for our lives in process now? . . . Might we awaken our culture from the sense that the matter at hand is some dull, opaque stuff, some lifeless and unfeeling substratum that we with our computer-like brains can manipulate however we please? The materialities of our lives. . . bespeak our most *spirited* interactions.”

**Prayer**

God of beginnings and becomings, your creative Spirit weaves through all creation. Help us to hear your persistent, ever-beckoning voice, joyfully calling us into co-creation through interconnectedness and mutuality. Amen.

## March 29

“What It Means to Seek God Perfectly” by Thomas Merton

*Oh God, from Your fountains fill my will with fire.*

*Shine in my mind. Occupy my heart.*

*Let my eyes see nothing but Your glory.*

*Let my hands touch nothing not for Your service.*

*Let my tongue taste no bread that does not strengthen me to praise Your mercy.*

*I will hear all harmonies You have created.*

*Keep me from the deadly sin which puts hell in my soul.*

*Keep me from lust that blinds my heart.*

*Keep me from loving money in which is hatred.*

*Keep me from avarice and ambition that suffocate.*

*Keep me from the dead works of vanity*

*and the thankless labor in which artists destroy themselves for pride and reputation.*

*Give me the strength that waits upon You in silence and peace.*

*Give me humility in which alone is rest.*

*Deliver me from pride, the heaviest of burdens.*

*Possess my whole heart and soul with the simplicity of love.*

*Occupy my life with the one desire of love*

*that I may love not for the sake of merit,*

*not perfection,*

*not virtue,*

*not sanctity,*

*but for You.*

~Quoted (and divided into poetic lines) from Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation* (44-45)

## Reflection

Thomas Merton was a twentieth-century American Cistercian monk, priest, mystic, and author. *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1961), his best-known book, is a revision of his earlier *Seeds of Contemplation*. In *New Seeds*, he says the noun “God” is “summed up in one awareness—not a proposition, but an experience: ‘I AM’” (4). Notably, “Yahweh” can be translated as “I Am That I Am.” Merton adds that the “Creating Spirit...dwells in us, and we in [Him/Her]” (5).

## Prayer

Ultimate Spirit—Being of the universe and my own “I AM” awareness—help me remember you are always here. Let me also find your Being and I AM-ness in the eyes, voices, love, touches, and actions of others. Turn my distractions and forgetfulness into opportunities to quietly reawaken myself to your comfort; let me rest in you.

## March 30

*“When Jesus was asked, ‘Which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ he said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’”*

~As quoted in Marcus Borg, *Convictions* (209)

### Reflection

What does it mean to love God? When I read these words in the mouths of Jesus, saints, and writers of the spiritual life, I enter a kind of vacuum, a strange absence of meaning: Do I truly love God?

In the last chapter of his book *Convictions*, Marcus Borg recounts how he was taught to believe in God and fear God, but maybe not how to love God. Then he adds, “Many scholars have argued that ‘fear’ in the phrase ‘fear of the Lord’ should be translated as ‘awe,’ ‘wonder,’ or ‘amazement’” (211).

I’ve been blessed to be loved by, and love, many people. Surely what I’ve learned about loving people is an entry into loving God, but it is also totally insufficient. God prompts awe in me in a way that human beings simply do not. The magnificent world God constantly creates leaves me speechless. And what does it mean that this God, who so often instills wonder and amazement in me, also lives within me as well as the created world?

### Prayer

Teach me how to love you more wholly. Help me feel and love your presence within me as well as your presence in the exterior world that so often evokes awe unbidden. Amen.

## March 31

**Romans 8.2:** *“For through your union with Christ Jesus, the Law of the life-giving Spirit has set you free from the Law of sin and death.”*

**Matt. 6.31-33:** *“Do not then ask anxiously ‘What can we get to eat?’ or... ‘What can we get to wear?’ All these are the things for which the nations are seeking, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But first seek his kingdom and the righteousness with him that he requires, and then all these things will be added for you.”*

~from *The Open English Bible*

### Reflection

How are we “set free” from Paul’s “Law of sin and death”? His followers asked whether they had to abide by every Law in the Torah—all 613 of them. Even Jesus sometimes broke them. Paul taught Jewish Christians to continue using them because, he said, they were perfect in their own way, helping prevent imperfection and loss of the Spirit. However, he said, gentile converts could instead follow God’s Law through “union with Christ Jesus.”

What is this union? It’s not an intellectual compact. In Matthew, Jesus says God will give us everything we need. However, two preconditions are required: We must seek “God’s kingdom” (or “the realm of the Spirit”) and do so with “righteousness”—that is, a disposition of “rightness with” or alignment toward God.

As Christians, we are not called to follow legalistic prescriptions. Rather, Jesus is saying, simply, set yourself in the realm of the Spirit. And Paul is saying, leap—run, fly, or ease your way into—Jesus.

### Prayer

Father-Mother God, help us follow your Law, not through an intellectual barrage of right and wrong, but rather by looking to you. Show yourself in the sunset, the bird’s song, the smile on another’s face, and our own warm hearts. Help us find your Law of the Universe in love.

**April 1**

*“Do everything in love.”*

~1 Corinthians 16:14

**Reflection**

There is a contemplative tradition in our Christian tradition called Lectio Divina which traditionally has four separate steps: read, meditate, pray, contemplate.

I invite you to try this form of meditation today with this short, 4-word sentence from 1 Corinthians. First read it a few times until you have it memorized. Then sit quietly for an unprescribed amount of time and repeat it over and over again slowly. A particular word may call out to you to be repeated on its own. Let these 4 words direct you.

Then when you are ready to let that go, say a prayer (the one below or your own). Then, hold these words in your mind for the rest of your day and see what you learn about them, yourself, and the world you experience.

**Prayer**

Fill me with your love God so that I may work to do everything in love. Amen.

## April 3

*“Grandfather, Look at our brokenness. We know that in all creation Only the human family Has strayed from the Sacred Way. We know that we are the ones Who are divided And we are the ones Who must come back together To walk in the Sacred Way. Grandfather, Sacred One, Teach us love, compassion, and honor That we may heal the earth And heal each other.”*

~Ojibwa prayer

### Reflection

In the Christian tradition, Lent is often about recognizing our many ways of turning away from God and a need to return to God. We spend some focused weeks on this and then celebrate Easter and often turn our attentions elsewhere.

What would it do for our communities and world if we held some parts of this Lenten posture for more of the year? Not to live somberly or in some sort of perpetual sacrifice, but to hold the words of this Ojibway prayer in constant loving hands: We know that in all creation Only the human family Has strayed from the Sacred Way.

May we endeavor to return the Sacred Way all year long.

### Prayer

God of many names, Sacred One, Teach us love, compassion, and honor That we may heal the earth And heal each other. Amen.



## April 4

*“If we beat the system at its own game, we’ve lost. It is no longer time to rush through the contested world blinded by fury and anger—however worthwhile these are. Now, we think, is the time to ‘retreat’ into the real work of reclamation, to re-member again our humanity through the intimacy of our relationships. The time is very urgent—we must slow down.”*

~Bayo Akomolafe, a Nigerian psychologist who speaks about the need to re-calibrate our ability to respond to civilizational crisis, said this at a Global South Conference in Johannesburg.

### Reflection

How wonderfully counter-intuitive this is in our Western cultures of impatience. We are often taught to react, to do the first thing that comes to our mind. But Akomolafe is asking us not to react, but to respond. And to respond we must first slow down. To respond is to hold this reactivity, recognizing what we may want to do quickly, and the slowing down so that we may respond thoughtfully and compassionately.

The urgencies of our world demand the best from us and often we can only give our best when we slow down.

### Prayer

God of stillness and movement, may we breathe together in this time of urgency so that we may slow down and respond thoughtfully. Amen.

## April 5

*“We’ve all been acculturated into accepting the inevitability of wrongful convictions, unfair sentences, racial bias, and racial disparities and discrimination against the poor.”*

~Bryan Stevenson

### Reflection

Just because something feels inevitable doesn't mean that it has to be. We have the power to change ourselves, our communities, and our world (for better and for worse).

When we decide something is inevitable, we give up. We step away. We become indifferent. As Elie Wiesel reminds us, “The opposite of love is not hate but indifference.”

What feels inevitable to you that doesn't have to be? What have you become indifferent to? How can you turn that indifference into active love and work to alter that which may feel “inevitable?”

### Prayer

God of love, stir my heart so that I may remember that the only inevitability is your love for me. Amen.

## April 6

The 20th-century monk and spiritual writer Thomas Merton (whose parents were both artists, and who was himself a notable poet, calligrapher, and photographer) wrote in October 1958:

*“I do not insist on this division between spirituality and art, for I think that even things that are not patently spiritual if they come from the heart of a spiritual person are spiritual.”*

### Reflection

I have always liked this quote from Thomas Merton (once I figured out the screwy phrasing). It reminds me that we are creative creatures even if we do not call ourselves artists. We are constantly taking disparate experiences and bits of knowledge and weaving them together in new ways to make a new meaning for ourselves. You are an artist. Your life and your communities are where you present your works of art.

What then are you making? What are you putting out into the world that may not have been there before? Is it rooted in love for yourself and for others?

### Prayer

Creative God, remind us of your abundant love in creation so that we may be love-creating artists as well. Amen.

**Good Friday****April 7**

*“Give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty.”*

~John 4:15

**Reflection**

We wonder about this water Jesus offers the woman at the well. She wonders about this water Jesus offers. Look at it this way—we cannot live without water. Water is life. Jesus is offering her life. Living water is not about carrying water to and from a well. It’s not finding a natural spring of water to quench physical thirst. Jesus is offering a life that is not contingent on her status, manner, or worship location. Jesus is offering her the source of life, an unbreakable connection to what is good, abundant, and everlasting. A life that will never leave her thirsty or empty or disconnected from the source of life.

In the moments when we are most conflicted, most outside of the realm of religious life, and most unsure about the path forward, Jesus comes offering us living water. That in the moment when we are looking for the grand miracle or the faith-generating grand spectacle, perhaps Jesus’ simple testimony about who he is and what he wants to give us may be the moment when we accept and hear Jesus tell us everything we’ve ever done and love us still.

**Prayer**

May we never see the divine gift of living water and abundant life as condemnation. May we remember that Jesus does not come to us to tell us how sinful we are, or to criticize us, or to condemn us. Jesus comes to us to offer us living water, that overflow of abundance that brings life. May it be so.