



Episcopal
Relief & Development
Working Together for Lasting Change

LENTEN 2019 MEDITATIONS



Dear Friend in Christ.

Lent is a time when we look for the deeper connections to our faith. Many of us approach this season in different ways, but one thing we have in common as Christians is the knowledge that we do not walk this path alone. Jesus built the Church as a community, as a body and as a family. During times of spiritual growth, we often turn to the insights and guidance of others to aid our own spiritual development.

Over the years, we have had wonderful feedback on our *Lenten Meditations*. That feedback has given us a sense of what readers find nurturing and life-giving on their own Lenten journeys. In this book, we have returned to meditations from the last ten years that have touched our readers most deeply. In doing so, we were reminded that we have been fortunate to share reflections from many gifted writers, teachers, theologians and spiritual guides.

As we walk together as followers of Jesus, we provide each other strength for the journey. We hope you will continue to share with us the experience of your Lenten journey and how Episcopal Relief & Development and our partners can accompany you along the way. Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support as we work together for lasting change.

May God continue to richly bless you this Lent and throughout the Church year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Josephine Hicks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Josephine Hicks
Vice President, Episcopal Church Programs
Episcopal Relief & Development

For over 75 years, Episcopal Relief & Development has been working together with supporters and partners for lasting change around the world. Each year the organization facilitates healthier, more fulfilling lives for more than 3 million people struggling with hunger, poverty, disaster and disease. Inspired by Jesus' words in Matthew 25, Episcopal Relief & Development leverages the expertise and resources of Anglican and other partners to deliver measurable and sustainable change in three signature program areas: Women, Children and Climate.



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Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

— *The Book of Common Prayer*

Lent has two quite remarkable bookends. On Ash Wednesday, we are reminded that we are dust and that God loves us even in our dustiness. At the end of this season, we will celebrate the power that God's love has to transform this world. Easter reminds us that not even death can keep us from God's unconditional love. As we follow in the footsteps of Jesus this Lent, we know that living out God's love for the world is our ultimate goal.

We also know that this walk with Jesus won't be easy. Following Jesus takes us through Good Friday and the cross. There will be struggles; there will be times when we stumble, but we are not alone. We are bound to one another as children of God. We share with Jesus in God's beloved family.

God came among us in the person of Jesus to show us how to be more than simply the human race. He came to show us how to realize God's dream, God's purpose, God's plan for us and for all creation.

Whatever devotion you practice this season of Lent, either giving up something that ties you to this world or taking on a spiritual task or discipline, let it be something that helps you participate in the movement of God's love in this world, following in the footsteps of Jesus and loving one another.

—Michael Bruce Curry

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

—Deuteronomy 7:9

The wilderness experience forged the people of Israel into a community shaped by God's everlasting covenant. The footsteps of Lent take us with Jesus as he is led by the Spirit of God into the depths of the wilderness. It is a time and place of testing and preparation for covenant life. Covenant life, loving God through loving our neighbor, is the work of ministry.

At the heart of this journey is a question posed by the Baptismal Covenant. *Will we seek and serve Christ in all persons?* The footsteps are reflection, judgment, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and ultimately salvation.

Lent is a time to reflect on the temptations that lead us away from acts that preserve human dignity. The path leads us straight into encounter with those who are in poverty, displaced and sick. It is a path of justice that leads to the heart of God. In what ways do you serve and seek Christ?

—Karen Montagno

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

—Mark 1:35

We all need time to be alone with God. For so much of the day we're so busy that God can't get a word in edgewise. The time you spend in quiet prayer multiplies the value of all your other time. It puts things in perspective—helps you see the bigger picture of your life. You distinguish between the important and the merely urgent.

The most enthusiastic people person in the world still needs some quiet time with God. Nobody will give it to you, so you have to claim it for yourself.

—Barbara Cawthorne Crafton

Blessed be the God of our salvation: Who bears our burdens and forgives our sins.

**—Opening Acclamation during Lent,
Enriching Our Worship 1**

Alienation.

Apparently it's part of the human condition...part of the mixed bag we get along with memory, reason and skill. It's that nagging sense that we're all alone in this mess and nobody, but nobody, will be there for us.

Faith comes next. Faith, that even if our colleagues, friends and family fail us (and they sometimes will), there is someone, something bigger than we are, who will not.

Gratitude follows faith. We don't have to bear it alone. We don't have to do it alone. When disaster strikes, or illness, or loss of work, we have an advocate who bears our burdens with us. When we have botched the job, we have an advocate who forgives us and encourages us to do better the next time.

Claire Joy



Sunday, March 10

Loving and merciful God, you bestow your grace on all of your children: Remember our sisters and brothers throughout the world who, in partnership with Episcopal Relief & Development, strengthen communities, empower the poor, nourish the hungry, restore the sick and uplift those affected by disaster; and uphold Episcopal Relief & Development, so that your Kingdom might be known to all people; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

—A Prayer for Episcopal Relief & Development

Throughout the forty days and forty nights that I lay prostrate before the Lord.

—Deuteronomy 9:25

Moses reluctantly answered God's call to lead the people of Israel through the wilderness. It was a "Who, me?" moment. The journey was fraught with struggle and rebellion.

Yet in the wilderness, Moses' reluctant heart was transformed. His heart became a heart for God and God's people. Here, Moses falls to the ground, pouring out his heart as he intercedes on their behalf. In intercessory prayer, we offer the needs of others to the care and reconciling will of God. A striking intercessory prayer is found in Jesus' words from the cross as he prays that we be forgiven.

During these forty days and nights, intercessory prayer is especially appropriate. As we pour out our hearts, we connect with a world struck by natural disaster, ecological destruction, famine and war. It is a "Who, me?" moment. What action am I being called to take in order to join the struggle of freedom from human bondage?

—Karen Montagno

*Bless this food to our use and us to thy loving and faithful service.
—The Book of Common Prayer, adapted*

When I was a child, I remember my family holding several Low Country boils: a feast of seafood and vegetables, slowly cooked together.

That meal was the work of all our hands—from the seafood caught by my grandfather, to the vegetables chopped by my aunts, to the giant, simmering pot stirred by my cousin and me.

The blessing my father prays at family gatherings always resonated most strongly with me at this particular meal. The “use” of this food was more than the nourishment of our bodies—it was the nourishment of our relationships with one another.

The journey we take together in our faith communities during Lent and beyond reminds me of that day of preparation and cooking. As we try to live as followers of Jesus, we work hard together, we laugh a lot, and we have a little (and sometimes more than a little) tension with one another. And we also anticipate—at the end of that day or season or lifetime—a wonderful celebration of abundance wrought ultimately by love.

—Nicole Seiferth

Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry?

—Matthew 25:37

The first day of April is when we put out our hummingbird feeders where I live. Four parts water to one part sugar is the mixture, a rich energy cocktail for those tiny bodies that burn through so many calories in a day. If they don't come on April 1—and they usually don't—we at least know they'll be along soon. It's my goal to make our backyard a hummingbird paradise, with as many flowers and feeders as I can muster back there.

Funny thing though, the hummers don't always want to live in paradise. Though there is plenty of food to go around—believe me when I tell you!—the hummingbirds fight to keep one another out of the yard. Sometimes I think they would rather fight over food than eat it.

They are like us: plenty to go around, but they won't share. Hoarding what they don't need and denying it to others who do need it. In the image of God we are made, it's true, but we are also like the animals.

Our dual nature is easy to spot—the selfish part is obvious. Less so are the steps we take to overcome it, the generosity we muster when we are at our best. But we are more than our worst faults: Human beings band together to minister to the suffering, sometimes. All faith communities enshrine that impulse, and the scripture passage we reflect on today suggests that it, more than anything else, is central to our life in faith.

—Barbara Cawthorne Crafton

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

—The Book of Common Prayer

Loving our neighbor can look like ensuring her ability to feed herself and her family. Jesus fed people, and that feeding is still central to how we remember and become his body in the world today.

Poor women—in his day and our own—often depend on male relatives for their livelihoods. Micro-finance, growing food more effectively and developing agricultural and market cooperatives are important tools that help the poor increase their ability to feed themselves and their children. That kind of development also brings dignity, as women find agency and become more effective partners in decision-making. Agency is an image of God's presence and action in the world.

Lent invites us to reflect on loving God and neighbor and to examine our own actions and inactions. Prayer, study, fasting and giving alms are traditional ways to observe this season—and all are avenues to loving more fully—with heart, mind, strength and substance. How will I live and love differently this Lent? How will I become God's agent and help others to do the same?

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.*

—Psalm 51:11

—Katharine Jefferts Schori



Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

—Matthew 14:16

Sometimes the challenge of meeting the hunger of the world can overwhelm us to the point of despair. Whether we are confronted by the gaunt, homeless woman we pass in the street, the crowded room of guests at the parish soup kitchen or the news footage of those starving as a result of war or natural disaster, the solution seems beyond us, and our helplessness becomes the agent of our detachment.

Jesus, sensing the hunger of those gathered by the Sea of Galilee to hear him teach, instructed his companions to get some food and feed them. Staggered by the size of the crowd, the disciples were overwhelmed by the prospect and responded by distancing themselves from both the task and the people themselves, replying, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish."

But Jesus knew how to address hunger, both the physical hunger of the crowd and the spiritual hunger of the disciples: one person at a time. And he denied the power of evil the tool it often uses to keep us from even getting started—helplessness.

When we are not helpless, neither are those who need our help.

—Mark Hollingsworth Jr.

Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth."

—Deuteronomy 8:17

Our human capacity to delude ourselves is amazing. It is so easy to imagine that it is our efforts, our skills, and our hard work that lie behind our success. Deuteronomy provides a blunt reminder that this is a deep self-deception. Every moment of living is a gift from God. The air we breathe and the ground on which we walk are all gifts. Any success we enjoy is made possible by the enabler and sustainer of us all—the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When things are going badly, we find ourselves very conscious of God. We desperately want God's help. Deuteronomy draws our attention to the deep irony that when things are going really well, we start thinking that we can live without God. Instead, we should learn to be grateful for our success and share that success with others.

Let us turn today into a day of gratitude and remember to share our blessings with others.

—Ian Markham



Sunday, March 17

Women

O gracious Lord, we humbly pray for the women of the world today. Born of different colors and creeds, we share the same concerns and needs. Lord, lift our heads and dry our tears, as you strengthen us and calm our fears. Comfort those who, on bended knee, seek a life where all live free. We pray for ourselves as well as others, as we pray for the future of children and mothers.
Amen.

—Lifting Women's Voices

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore.

—Revelation 22:1-3

At the beginning of the Bible, we are given a vision of a garden called Eden that holds a tree of life. At the end of the Bible, we are given a vision of the city of God, and in the middle of that city, on the banks of a river, there is yet again a tree of life, whose leaves are made for the healing of the world.

The tree of life—whose leaves drip with oil, whose bark can be made into teas, whose roots can be ground and eaten—is our eternal gift. The tree of life, made for healing, is the first and last vision of the kingdom. It reminds us that God’s healing is sewn into the very fabric of creation. It runs deep beneath our feet, and it will carry us through our lives until we reach the heavenly kingdom.

Creation holds so many gifts for our healing; we are graced when we turn toward it.

—Becca Stevens

The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God...For nothing will be impossible with God."

—Luke 1:35, 37

The Old and New Testaments are filled with accounts of visits from angels. In the Annunciation story, God sends the Archangel Gabriel with a message for Mary. Gabriel conveys God's message that Mary is chosen to bear God's Son. The angel's visit changes Mary's life and changes the world for all time.

We don't hear much about angels today. In the West, the very notion of angels has been largely defined by the media and actualized in gift shop tchotchkes. If angels visit us, in our dreams or even our waking hours, we aren't talking about it.

Yet, Gabriel's parting words to Mary remind us that "nothing will be impossible with God." In each of us there exists the potential not only to receive visits by angels but even to serve as messengers of God.

Like Gabriel's life-changing, world-changing effect, each of us has the potential, and baptismal call, to change the world. It is us, God's contemporary angels, who can heal a hurting world. The Holy Spirit bestows the resources, the will and the responsibility upon us at our baptism.

A hungry child...a struggling woman, afraid for her life...a young boy, forced to hold a rifle...all are waiting for an angel. What will it take for you to be the angel?

—Bonnie Anderson

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

—Acts 2:44-45

One way we might live as followers of Jesus is to look to those who were closest to him: How did the earliest Christians live? How did those who knew Jesus live as his followers?

Acts tells us they sold all they had, held their money in common and helped those in need. Whatever its appeal, this model has not prevailed. Yet I think it's time to engage again the question of what we own and what we hold in common.

As I grapple with this, the refrain that echoes in my mind is not that we *should* hold all in common, but that we *do* hold all things in common.

Wendell Berry famously says: "Do unto those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you." Our neighbors downstream depend on us to care for our part of the river, so the water is clean for them, too. Every person reading this is someone's upstream neighbor.

We care for the river in common. It belongs to all of us. In fact, it all belongs to all of us. Property deeds and car titles try to convince us differently, but they cannot hide the truth that we all must care for one another, and those with resources have a particular responsibility for those in need.

—Rosa Lee Harden

No more shall there be in [Jerusalem] an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime.

—Isaiah 65:20a

Some years ago, a local Christian community of women in Nicaragua read this passage from Isaiah and heard God speaking directly to them. The women were very poor. Their children were malnourished, and their old people were dying all too soon. They were given a vision of their babies living long, healthy lives. Their plain reading of the text inspired them to act.

This group of mothers went to the Ministry of Health and learned that their diets did not contain enough protein and that soy flour mixed with corn flour would help supply what was needed. But their neighbors were not accustomed to the new flour and were reluctant to use it. The women opened a restaurant to introduce soy-enriched tortillas. Soon, families began to like the new taste and used the new flour. The health of young and old dramatically improved.

When the Bible speaks directly to us about God's hope for the people—when we are willing and ready to take that hope into ourselves—we are empowered to act. God's promise becomes our reality.

We hold God's dream as told by Isaiah not only for Jerusalem but also for our families and for the world.

—Phoebe Griswold



There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?

—John 6:9

“Nothing is little in God’s service,” wrote George Herbert, the English poet and Anglican priest. “If it once have the honour of that Name, it grows great instantly.”

Most of the days I have served God have not been filled with big moments, dramatic flourishes, recognition or accolades. Most days have been filled with small things: speaking a kind word, crafting a sermon, working on a newsletter, recruiting a church school teacher. The days are filled with taking communion to a lonely man whose wife of sixty years recently died, praying with people who are unemployed and then calling to see if they might have a lead on a job, writing a thank-you note and then another, saying my prayers, breaking the bread and drinking the cup.

These are the daily practices of love and service that never make headlines but do, day by day, help heal a hurting world. George Herbert is right. I believe it with all my heart: Nothing is little in God’s service. Everything we do (well, almost everything) becomes great when we offer it to God. To learn that and remember it is a spiritual practice for our entire lives.

—Gay Clark Jennings

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."

—John 4:34

Jesus was a Jewish rabbi who had violated an important custom of his time: he had dared to talk to a woman in public. Naturally, this caused consternation. Jesus explains that his mission is to meet the needs of those around him. And it is this service—this mission—that sustains him.

All of us are called to serve others. We live in a world of need—people are coping with injustice, hunger, war and disease. As Paul tells us in the book of Romans, it is a privilege to meet needs. Creating space in our lives to help others is at the heart of the Christian faith. And sometimes such service creates consternation. At such moments, we need to keep our eyes focused on the labor, the ministry and the difference we are making in caring for others.

—Ian Markham



Sunday, March 24

Children

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

—The Book of Common Prayer

Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?

—1 Chronicles 29:5

On a recent trip to Ghana I toured several communities participating in the *NetsforLife*® program. Once the final community visit was complete, everyone gathered to share some of their stories with me at a “durbar.” At the end of the presentations, the leader came forward to say that he had a presentation to make to me.

As I sat down, the leader said that although they had a gift to give to me, they were very embarrassed, as it was such a small gift. He told me that they had wanted to give me an elephant as a gesture of thanks, as that was the grandest gift they could imagine presenting to show how important the malaria nets were to their community.

However, they weren’t able to give me an elephant. Instead they had decided to collect all of the eggs laid that day and present them to me.

The eggs represented the entire village’s wealth for that day. It was everything they had, and they wanted to share it with me—truly a living theology of abundance in a place of scarcity. How can we do any less?

—Robert W. Radtke

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

—Ephesians 4:15-16

I know, I know. Anybody of any spiritual interest at all seems to be saying, “I am spiritual but not religious.” We know what they mean, that they enjoy a purer sense of the holy when they are not trapped and frustrated by the mechanics and structure and sometimes sheer boredom of institutional life.

But good spirituality is always about the body as well as the soul. Our bodies really do carry soul. And bodies need bones and muscles and ligaments; our bodies need mechanics. From the greatest to the least. So it is that Ephesians 4:16 indicates that the Body of Christ is joined and knit together by every ligament doing its part.

The root meaning of the word “religion” includes the root meaning of ligament, “to tie back together.” Good religion, then, is about tying and holding together the critical pieces of our spirituality.

Pray for the Church today. Pray for the Church as a living body, which really does need structures and ligaments, from the greatest to the least. That body really does carry the living Christ, our Soul.

—Sam Candler

*Let nothing disturb thee. Let nothing dismay thee. All things pass.
God never changes.*

—Saint Teresa of Ávila

My spiritual director often reminds me to stop and rest. Sometimes I need the reminder in a very literal way because I really need more sleep. Other times I need these words to help me focus on why I do what I do. In this sense, I understand “stop and rest” to mean I need to be present and rest in the moment and to be open to encountering God in everything. A few years ago, I taped a short prayer by Saint Teresa of Ávila to my computer screen because it reminded me of an important and simple fact: God is constant. God is faithful.

Recently, I decided that I was going to use that prayer to cultivate a practice of being more present in my own daily life and work. A few times throughout the day, I’ll stop what I’m doing, pray this simple, short prayer, and reflect on how I’ve noticed God’s presence. Sometimes I have experienced God in a conversation about mission; other times I see God in formulas that actually work the way I want them to in spreadsheets. Intentionally taking time to look for God has helped reinforce what I hold to be true: God is always present.

How do you stop and rest in God?

—Elizabeth Boe

Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

—The Book of Common Prayer

There is a tradition among the Lakota People of South Dakota called the “Hunka” ceremony. Hunka is used as an adoption rite, a public acknowledgment that one has become a brother, a daughter, grandson or just about any form of family relation one can imagine. These adoptions are viewed in the same way as biological family members. The Lakota exercise great devotion to family and make no distinction between close or distant relations. When an individual adopts someone as a brother through the Hunka ceremony, both families become joined as one.

It should come as no surprise that we approach the sacrament of baptism the same way as the Hunka. Jesus adopts the baptismal candidate, becoming our elder brother, and Jesus’ father becomes our father. The new connection goes much deeper: Now all of Jesus’ relatives become our relatives. This includes all Christians – including all of those with whom we may disagree. There may be discord and tensions in all families, but within God’s family, we are called to make peace and to give love no matter how difficult. Together as a family, we can work toward God’s peace and love.

—Paul Sneve



Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...Is it not to share your bread with the hungry?

—Isaiah 58:6-7a

Fridays are hungry days. Most weeks I fast after dinner on Thursday until dinner on Friday. I fast because I practice a rule of life that requires it. I've found no better practice to remind me of the suffering of those who are hungry and my need to live within the limits of simplicity. Fasting is a way of making room—room for God, space to help us understand the cravings that drive us to want more than enough.

When time allows it, I bake bread on my hungry Fridays. I use a recipe that will require my time and attention for the whole day and yields two loaves. With one loaf I break my fast, savoring the flavors of this sacramental food. I give away the second loaf to a neighbor, a friend or to someone in need. This practice serves as a reminder that there is always enough if we live within our limits. By going hungry for one day each week, I can make room in my life to answer Isaiah's call to fast. In hungering in solidarity and sharing bread with the hungry, I feel a partnership in God's work of loosening the bonds of injustice.

—Ragan Sutterfield

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love; Here's my heart, O take and seal it, Seal it for thy courts above.

—“Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

All too often during worship, I get to the end of a hymn that I've just sung and realize that I haven't paid any attention to the lyrics. Any of them. I've been on autopilot, belting out the all-too-familiar words, lustily adding harmony to the “Amen” and then moving on to the next part of worship.

But the lyrics of “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” pierce my heart, every time. I simply can't be on autopilot when singing what feels like a bold confession: I am not a faithful servant of God. In fact, not only do I stray from the right paths, but I also feel myself straying. How can I sing, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,” without getting a lump in my throat? Fortunately, at Episcopal Relief & Development, I take comfort and strength from my colleagues whose lives are dedicated to nurturing and feeding and walking in solidarity with our partners around the globe.

And if I need role models for staying the course, I think of our sisters and brothers throughout the world who overcome great challenges to serve their families, their communities and their God. Who nudges you back on the path? What keeps you from wandering? Who are your spiritual role models?

—Esther Cohen



Sunday, March 31

Climate

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

—The Book of Common Prayer

No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

—Romans 6:13

Week after week, we make the offering of “ourselves, our souls, our bodies” to God out of the gratefulness of our hearts. This offering that we make at the Eucharist is met by the offering God makes in Christ and there is union, even communion, with the divine. We, as well as the bread of the Eucharist, become the Body of Christ.

What we then carry into a despairing world is hope, rooted in our baptisms and nurtured in that union with Christ in the Eucharist. We offer ourselves to God as instruments of healing to a hurting world.

How God might use us is God's decision. The decision to make ourselves available is always ours.

—Duncan Gray III

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

—Matthew 19:13-15

Jesus welcomed all the children to come to him, laid his hands on them and blessed them all. There were no questions about who their parents were, whether they were clean or unclean or if they belonged to another ethnic group. Loving, welcoming and blessing children is one of the most prophetic and radical acts we are called to do as a church and as a society.

How a church and society welcomes children determines our spiritual health. More than sixteen million children live in poverty in America— most are African American and Latino. Poverty causes unnecessary suffering and death-dealing consequences, which results in the death of many children before they reach adulthood.

The words and actions of Jesus are a mandate for us. Notice the children and their families in our midst. Bless them. Welcome them, feed them, educate them, protect them and give them hope in this life. There is no other way to follow Jesus; we must bless the children.

—Mark Bozzuti-Jones

*Make me a channel of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord,
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.*

—The Peace Prayer attributed to Saint Francis

One of my favorite prayers is the Peace Prayer of Saint Francis—especially when it's sung to an adaptation composed by Sebastian Temple. I am the daughter of a Lutheran pastor and a music minister who met through choir in college; singing has been a pillar of my spiritual life since I could hold a hymnal. Some of my favorite memories are of my two younger sisters in the pew next to me, singing soft harmonies during Christmas or raucous Alle-you-know-whats during Easter. I tear out verses from bulletins to post on my fridge at home and sing refrains in my head while making tea at work.

Part earworm and part meditation, these are moments to commune with the cloud of witnesses who create and sustain a spiritual tradition that I love. I love this hymn because it puts things in perspective, puts me in perspective—not as the source of the peace, the love, the power that's going to put things right, but as the channel. My job is to be open, to be present, to do what I can.

Setting things to music makes them memorable, and this is a message worth remembering—a holy earworm for Saint Francis.

—Faith Rowold

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God.

—Philemon 1:4

Not many months ago I took an unplanned retreat: four months in a hospital bed, my own 4-by-8 hermitage. At first prayer did not come easily or at all, from my end at least. But I was very aware of all the prayer without ceasing. As I started to heal, I would fix my eyes on an Ethiopian cross in my room and breathe, in and out, and eventually start thanking God for all who were praying in action and word.

The prayers that came easiest were the long lists of thank you and thank God for all who had a hand in my healing: my loving wife and children, parents and siblings, extended family, friends, my parish and diocesan family, colleagues and partners at Episcopal Relief & Development, surgeons, nurses, aides, therapists, administrators, chaplains, cleaners, countless people known and unknown, near and far off. The list does not end. Their actions and words were the healing prayers that saved my life and helped me see life in a new way. Now when I feel tired and spiritually depleted, I pull out my list and say thank you and thank God for all.

—Brian Sellers-Petersen



What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

—Micah 6:8

How might we engage justice and peace in our common, shared life in this hurting world? How may we become a church that moves beyond “my pain” to discern and respond to global “our pain?”

We are limited in what each of us can do, so we tend to acknowledge the loudest screams and study and act upon them. Instead, we need all of us to pursue our passionate spirituality with thoughtful engagement. While we are called to bring attention to our discerned areas of passion, we should also be careful not to unintentionally exclude the voiceless.

We need to find ways to move ahead as a community without creating more of a polarizing “us/them” culture. As passionate advocates, sometimes we end up creating such dichotomy unintentionally. When we hold individual responsibility and communal accountability in better balance, we may become more of an empowered, beloved community, reflecting the justice and peace of God.

—Prince Singh

Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the Lord; speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word.

—Jeremiah 26:2

A lone prophet stands in the temple. God charges Jeremiah to speak and not leave out one word. God's urgent call prevails on the people to follow the ways of God.

Prophets are stewards of God's word. The tradition of prophecy and stewardship is ancient. The Word of God moved over the void calling all things into being. Humankind was given to be stewards of creation, caring for it and ensuring its abundance.

Our natural and spiritual lives depend on our stewardship of all creation. The Word of God still speaks in all realms of creation, bringing about reconciliation and abundant life.

The Christian community knows the prophetic tradition most fully in Jesus Christ. As followers of the living Word, we are heirs of this tradition. At no time in history has the Word been more urgent for us to be stewards taking prophetic steps of care and reconciliation. Our life together depends on it.

—Karen Montagno

Boston 
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Sunday, April 7

US Disaster Recovery and Response

God, our times are in your hand. In the midst of uncertainty lead us by your never-failing grace as we seek to be agents of healing and hope. Walk with us through difficult times; watch over us in danger; and give to us a spirit of love and compassion for those who suffer and mourn. And finally remind us that you have promised never to leave us so that even in the valley of the shadow of death your love may be felt, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

—Lyndon Harris

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, Yes,
they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

—“We Are One in the Spirit”
Peter Scholtes

When I was a child, the words of this song helped me to know what it means to be a Christian. When you are a child, you know the love of your parents and other family members. You know the love of friends who surround your family. You might even know love in caring for an animal companion. When I was a child, I knew that to be Christian meant to share love.

As an adult, I started to think of this song as corny or simplistic. The words have not changed, but I have. At some point in my life, my understanding of love became much more complex. Love is not always a simple thing. The Everly Brothers' song, “Love Hurts,” tells of a love that “scars, wounds and mars.” As a parent, to love a child carries the weight of a world of care and concern.

Recently, I visited St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas. After communion, the congregation sang this song from my childhood. In that moment, I reflected back on my childhood understanding of love. Love is complex, but the love we share with others when we “seek and serve Christ” in them should reflect God's love for us—which is simply there, with no strings attached.

How will you let the world know you are a Christian today?

—Sean McConnell

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—The Book of Common Prayer

Healing comes in many forms. Ministering to and with children and youth has taught me that some of the most effective and life-giving healing comes from others. When we have failed, are hurting, are struggling or are in pain, the healing that reaches deepest into our soul comes from being with other people and sharing in that struggle.

When we are able to gather together as people of God, call upon the Lord for guidance and healing and talk honestly about who we are, what we are struggling with and how we can support one another, that is when we can truly begin to heal. In those moments we see we are not that different from one another, that we are all flawed and we all yearn for a life of health and wholeness.

As you seek healing in whatever way, gather with a group of friends, call upon the Lord, share your struggles and pray for one another to find healing and wholeness.

—Shannon Ferguson Kelly

Then some people came, bringing to [Jesus] a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.

—Mark 2:3-4

Many biblical healing stories describe service offered on behalf of others.

In this case, a group of devoted friends carry a paralyzed man to Jesus. They refuse to be discouraged by a crowd filling Jesus' house. They are totally fine with removing the roof of the house. They care little about interrupting Jesus' presentation. They know Jesus can heal their friend, and they are single-minded in their determination to have the master make their friend whole again.

Many obstacles might deter us as we seek healing in our hurting world. The enormity of problems can overwhelm us. Mark's Gospel holds up these faithful friends as models of the persistent and audacious pursuit of healing. These friends couldn't heal the paralysis. But they knew Jesus could. Our beautiful and broken world needs healing. We can't do it on our own. Together as Christ's body we move toward healing. Today we must ignore the obstacles, take a first step and bring our hurting world to Christ's healing presence and power.

—Jay Sidebotham

The night is quiet. Let the quietness of your peace enfold us, all dear to us, and all who have no peace. The night heralds the dawn. Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys, new possibilities.

**—Night Prayer, *A New Zealand Prayer Book*
*He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa***

It's hard to think about what enough means after a disaster. With so many people so acutely struggling right in your own community, you know you must do something. But how many things can you do? Who can you serve? Who are you missing who is still in desperate need? And when can you stop and catch your breath? When are you allowed to rest?

This concept of enough—these questions—kept me up at night when I was helping clear out flooded homes in the months following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Had I done enough? Had I forgotten anyone? Had I prioritized those we could serve properly and justly?

I could never answer those questions. I still can't. But in the months following the storm, I found that I could quiet them through prayer. I lit a candle next to my bed almost every night and read the Compline service to myself, whispering both parts in the darkness. Most nights, that routine, those words I grew to know by heart, were all the prayer that I could muster with my scattered, distracted mind. But somehow that ritual, that flame, those whispers and that connection to God kept the anxiety at bay. My time in prayer reminded me that while the challenges are many, they're not mine to shoulder alone. There will always be enough work for tomorrow, but in the meantime, we can sit with the darkness and the quiet and try, for a moment, to find some peace and strength for what lies ahead—and to know that God is always enough.

—Katie Mears



“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

—Matthew 1:23

It was a crazy dream—one that seemed to relieve Joseph of his great concern over Mary but that hinted at something far greater than an ill-timed pregnancy. This child will be called “Emmanuel, God with us.” The naming of this miracle announces the uniting of heaven to earth so that God’s holiness will be known in human flesh.

No longer would human flesh be understood as anything less than holy. From this moment on, no one could be disposable; all have transcendent and eternal value because he is Emmanuel.

The widow and orphan, the sick and destitute, the refugee and the prisoner, the invisible and the forgotten—all bear the divine image and are dearly loved by Joseph’s son. Care for me, says Jesus, through your care for the least of these.

—Duncan Gray III

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

—Genesis 1:27

I love to cycle. A couple of years ago, six of us set out on a sponsored pilgrimage to raise money for a home for street children in Brazil. We rode throughout the United Kingdom in a sporting, spiritual journey that took in twenty stadiums over ten days and covered a thousand miles. Some days were a slog; there were times when I wanted to stop, get off my bike and walk. But there were also those moments when the pilgrimage was something else, something good, something that mattered, something, well...beautiful. We would stop and enjoy these times together—a view of the ocean, a climb completed, a panorama that took our breath away.

We are made of soul and bone, dust and spirit, and as we made our journey, we talked about life—the mess, the questions, the drumming in our hearts insisting that there must be a point to all this madness. After the sunset on our final day, we concluded that society has tried to teach us that we want success but what we really crave is wonder. We find wonder when we engage in the creative—and in the art of building community with those near and far.

—Andy Bowerman



Sunday, April 14

Working Together for Lasting Change

Almighty God our heavenly Father, guide the nations of the world into the way of justice and truth, and establish among them that peace which is the fruit of righteousness, that they may become the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

—The Book of Common Prayer

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Disaster overtakes disaster, the whole land is laid waste. Suddenly my tents are destroyed, my curtains in a moment.

—Jeremiah 4:19-20

Jeremiah is like a person who has just read the newspaper or watched the evening news. One disaster builds upon another. His heart races. He feels the ruin as if it were his own. Reading the latest news, many of us have the same reaction.

The continual pace of human suffering, much of it caused by our own hands, is staggering. One might be tempted to simply turn away. Nothing seems to quiet the pounding of our hearts. Jeremiah can't turn away. He cannot be silent.

Spiritual connection to creation and each other will disturb our silence. During Lent, the Spirit groans within us along with creation. Its groans drive us deep into human wilderness in search of reconciliation. In the wilderness, we walk with Jesus. We learn the power of one small act to shatter silence—in witness to the truth of God's voice calling us to wholeness and reconciling love.

—Karen Montagno

A world in need now summons us to labor, love, and give; to make our life an offering to God that all may live.

—Frank von Christerson

This particular bit from a favorite hymn always takes on deeper meaning for me during Lent. As we journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem, we know the journey leads to a cross on a hill, to the ultimate self-offering of the One who loved us enough to become one of us, to show us how to love one another.

When I consider that cross, that self-offering love and our response to it, I hear Sister Joan Chittister's challenge to "go through life reclaiming the planet an inch at a time until the Garden of Eden grows green again."

None of us can do it all. But every single one of us can do an inch. The world that summons us with a deep yearning for hope, peace, justice, healing is the garden God charges us to tend as stewards of creation, as beacons of God's love, compassion and healing. It is where we are called, in Jesus' name, to offer our lives so others may live abundantly. It is where we are challenged to work together to heal a hurting world.

As we journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem, what inch of the garden can you reclaim today?

—Susan Russell

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.

—John 12:3a

In the journey of life, circumstances will often align and we find ourselves with a momentary opportunity to act in accord with the passion of Christ. Someone is sick, hurting, in pain or in the hospital, and just for one moment we get the feeling that we should do something—visit, call, send some flowers. The moment quickly passes, and the rush of life takes over. What we learn from Mary is that a momentary act of love, seemingly unimportant but prompted by a gut feeling, can have enormous consequences when it taps into the will of God. It makes me wonder what acts God is calling us to do for those and with those around us.

What acts of selfless love are we being called to do in order to change others' lives and honor God in each other?

—Shannon Ferguson Kelly

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

—John 13:34

The Gospel of John uses two Greek verbs for love interchangeably: *agape* for self-giving love and *phileo* for the love of a friend. It's as if the author of the Gospel of John can't tell the difference between a regular friend and the kind that you would die for. Upping the stakes, the gospel writer has Jesus commanding us to live in this relationship. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you." If it weren't a commandment, I might shrink from it. I can only take up this great task if some greater power requires it. Living in love is not just about the pleasure of another's company—it is also about the cracking open of my heart. It isn't just about the feeling of love – it's about the decision to love.

Significantly, the Gospel of John never commands people to love God. The love that you might think is the first and greatest commandment isn't found in John's Gospel. Instead, we are commanded to love each other. It is in this love that we find God's love. Love binds God in the dance we call Trinity. Love is the power of God to hold all things together in singularity and to open our hearts so there is more room for the Trinity to dwell and dance in our lives. When we dare to have our hearts opened, God is able to draw closer to us. When we risk losing our autonomy in relationship, God is right next to us, making us into love.

—Paul D. Fromberg



Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:35, 38-39

My spiritual discipline would be better characterized as undisciplined. As with many people, I suspect, my prayer life becomes much more active and intentional when a crisis arises. When someone I love is diagnosed with cancer. I have a health scare of my own. A friend loses her job. A loved one dies.

This passage from Romans comforts and reassures me in all times of crisis. Nothing in scripture or in our understanding of God's love tells us that we will not face crisis, pain and even death. But this passage reminds me that while God does not erase the tough times—God does not even remove the cup from God's own son's lips—God is always with us. God's love always surrounds us. That is no small comfort.

—Josephine Hicks

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

—Acts 2:44-45

It might be difficult for Christians today to understand that only a few decades ago, these words from Acts were viewed with some suspicion, as they sounded a bit like Communist propaganda. To the Cold War generation in America, this description of the early believers' communal life was enough to make Christian capitalists quite nervous.

But it is not political ideology that is being promoted in the Acts of the Apostles but rather a glimpse into what it means to live together in Christ. The beauty – no, the miracle – of what was happening in that first-century community is that a group of otherwise different, diverse people found the grace every day to see Christ in one another and to care for each other as they would wish to be cared for. It was not a state decree that compelled them to share, to give, to be stewards of one another. It was the love of God that inspired them to do so.

The early Church grew not simply because of great preaching or astounding signs but because people around them noticed with awe that these members of the Jesus Movement truly loved one another. The world could see they were Christians by their love. May it be so today with us.

—C.K. Robertson

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.

—Isaiah 65:17-18

All around the world today, Christians are waking up to “new heavens and a new earth.”

Easter’s promise of renewal and rebirth has special resonance for me. At Episcopal Relief & Development we try to help communities become the places that God imagines they should be. Places of joy. Places of hope. Places of sanctuary. Places where the abundant life is open to all of God’s children. We try to make every morning an Easter morning.

By helping **Children** reach vital health and developmental milestones, we ensure that they can reach their God-given potential.

By working with faith leaders to reduce violence against **Women** and children in their communities, we bring healing and reconciliation.

By strengthening communities to face the mounting natural disasters brought about by our changing **Climate**, we build resilience.

By **working together for lasting change** every morning can be Easter morning.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

—Robert W. Radtke

MY LENTEN RESPONSE

During this season of spiritual growth, I want to follow Jesus' example to love and care for neighbors around the world. I want to help empower communities and to invest in thriving futures.

Episcopal Relief & Development facilitates healthier, more fulfilling lives in communities courageously addressing hunger, poverty, disease and disaster. I want to join in partnership with churches, communities and friends to make a difference in the lives of more than 3 million people worldwide.

I would like to join with Episcopal Relief & Development to bring lasting change for Women, Children and the Climate. Enclosed is my Lenten offering to help communities thrive.

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Each year, Episcopal Relief & Development facilitates healthier, more fulfilling lives for more than 3 million people around the world struggling with hunger, poverty, disaster, and disease. The organization works with Anglican partners to create long-term development strategies focused on delivering results in three signature program areas: Women, Children, and Climate.

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