



# LENTEN 2020 MEDITATIONS



Dear Friend in Christ,

Thank you for joining Episcopal Relief & Development for this holy season of Lent. Our Lenten meditations this year focus on the spiritual lives of children and how children inspire the spiritual lives of adults.

Why children? In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." Children show us the face of God and help us to know the heart of God.

Around the world, 155 million children under the age of six are not reaching their full potential because of inadequate nutrition and health care. We know that the first years of life form a foundation for future learning, good health and well-being. Episcopal Relief & Development works with communities to ensure children have access to food, clean water and quality health care. When these basic needs are met, the lives of all people in the community improve.

Episcopal Relief & Development is committed to helping those whom Christ calls the greatest among us, so they can better reach their God-given potential to learn, grow and thrive.

As you pray and reflect upon the meditations in this booklet, I invite you to remember the children in your family, faith community and life—and the lessons they might teach you. I invite you to learn more about Episcopal Relief & Development's work with children and how you can help us expand that work through our ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE campaign. We ask you to pray for the children in our programs and those who care for them. Please also pray for our partners and staff as they strive to help communities thrive. Thank you for partnering with us as we work together for lasting change.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Chad M. Brinkman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Chad M. Brinkman  
Director, Campaign  
Episcopal Relief & Development

ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE is a grassroots church-wide campaign dedicated to expanding the organization's global programs, improving the lives of children up to age six. We invite you to join ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE by:

- LEARNING about our work with children
- SHARING about that work with others
- GIVING of your time and talent

toward our collective goal of reaching more children.

To learn more about ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE, please visit [www.episcopalrelief.org/1000DaysOfLove](http://www.episcopalrelief.org/1000DaysOfLove).





## Contributors

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This year’s Lenten Meditations reflect a collaboration with GrowChristians.org, a ministry of Forward Movement committed to nurturing faith in children and those who love them. We extend our gratitude to the GrowChristians authors and especially to editor Allison Sandlin Liles. Visit [GrowChristians.org](https://GrowChristians.org) to learn more.

***As a father has compassion for his children, so does the LORD care for those who fear him. For he himself knows whereof we are made; he remembers that we are but dust. Our days are like the grass; we flourish like a flower of the field.***

**—Psalm 103:13-15**

I have been watching my daughters rear three caterpillars: Freckles, Nickel and Noah. The girls found them in their grandparents' garden, took them home, and introduced them to a net enclosure. Noah mysteriously disappeared (did he find a hole and escape?). Freckles built her cocoon. But Nickel passed suddenly one morning; his soft little body no longer moving. My youngest, her lips trembling, carried him gently through the house in a tissue. "I don't want to leave him alone in the wind!" she sobbed. "It isn't fair that he will not grow and live."

No, it isn't fair. It isn't fair that so many children around the world also fail to thrive. Science has clarified (just as we know that a caterpillar can turn into a butterfly) that the human brain grows and strengthens in response to song and laughter and clapping games and tickles and snuggles, alongside water and nutrition. Acts of love early in life are essential to human flourishing across the lifetime.

The psalmist reminds us in today's reading that "the life of mortals is like grass," like ash. Yet, love remains. Love flows between and strengthens the generations, one caregiver to the next. Love carries us in a shroud of tissues when we pass.

**—Abigail Nelson**

***Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.***

**—James 1:27**

“What does the Christian faith have to do with social justice?” I get asked this question with surprising frequency, oftentimes by longtime churchgoers. It is frustrating because in passage after passage, scripture argues that faith finds its end point in acts of justice.

Resist the temptation to make James 1:27 abstract. In the United States alone, more than 400,000 children and youth are in the foster care system. Widows were among the most defenseless and vulnerable members of first century Judean society. The book of James is arguing that faith includes worrying one’s self over the wellbeing of the most marginalized members of society.

Isaiah 58 drives this point home even further. In this chapter, God condemns fasting and other acts of worship that confine themselves to the temple. God counters: “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” Faith shouldn’t end in liturgical preciousness. Our beautiful worship and profound prayer life must culminate in acts that loosen the bonds of injustice.

**—Miguel Escobar**



***But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.***

**—Mark 10:43-44**

I am an innately selfish human being. I like drinking my coffee—alone—while it's still hot. I like lingering while grocery shopping. I like eating what I want, when I want. For the first twenty-seven years of my life, I served in the ways that were comfortable for me and offered accolades and credit. Then I became a mother. The birth of my children brought acts of servanthood lived out in the middle-of-the-night feedings, in changing the sheets for the umpteenth time without applause, in laundry and laundry and laundry.

For me it was motherhood. For others it is in the care of a spouse. For some it is in the daily hidden battles of life that no one understands. But for all of us, when we serve from a space only fed by love, Christ's very nature is revealed. When I am being like Christ, when I am living in a way that glorifies God, it's not about me. My coffee is often cold, and I rush through the grocery store, but I also experience deep peace knowing my life is poured out in a way that brings more love into this world. Christ is the perfect example of loving service and the ways that love begets love.

**—Emily Rutledge**

***And Jesus increased in wisdom and years, and in divine and human favor.***

***—Luke 2:52***

It is a great mystery that God took on flesh as a human. I mean mystery as it is used in the New Testament, not as a puzzle or a riddle that we strive to solve. The scriptural sense of mystery is that the more attention we give to God's saving action, the more it works on *us*.

I have an icon on my desk of the Blessed Virgin Mary holding the Christ child. He looks tenderly at his mother, with his little hand wrapped around her neck, the other hand stretching out to complete his embrace. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God. He is totally dependent upon his human mother to nurture him so that he might increase in wisdom and years and live into the life to which God calls him.

We are entrusted with the care of children in our families, churches, communities and in our world—each of them dependent upon us to nurture them that they, too, might increase in wisdom and years and live into the lives that God calls them. It is a great mystery that will continue to work on us, if only we will give it our attention.

**—Jamie Osborne**

**Sunday, March 1**

## **Join Episcopal Relief & Development for ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE**

**Because every child deserves the chance to  
reach their full potential**

Research shows that the first 1,000 days are foundational, affecting a child's capacity to grow, learn and thrive over his or her entire life. The first few years form the basis for future learning, good health and nutrition and overall well-being.

One example of how Episcopal Relief & Development is changing the lives of children is through *Moments That Matter*, a program partnership of Episcopal Relief & Development that works directly with mothers, fathers and other primary caregivers to improve the growth and development of children up to age three. The program also links families with available health, nutrition and critical services provided by government and other stakeholders and strengthens the community's early childhood development capabilities.

*Moments That Matter* is just one of the organization's successful initiatives that will be expanded during this 1,000-day campaign. On each Sunday during Lent, we will provide details of how the ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE campaign will help communities nurture healthy children under the age of six.





***Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers?***

***—The Book of Common Prayer***

When I was growing up, there were few children in my small Episcopal church. I don't have strong memories of Sunday school lessons or wild lock-ins with a big youth group. What I do remember is worship. I remember the slow hymns, the distinctive smell of polished wood, the loud clatter of falling change as I played with the contents of my mother's purse. In all of those absent-minded moments, in all of that day-in-and-day-out ordinariness of prayer and sacrament, I was being instructed to hunger for the gifts of God. It didn't even, necessarily, have a theological content; there was just a givenness there, that church was where I belonged. Later, plenty of things got in the way of that sense of comfort, but from the start, it was, and still is, about a basic nourishment.

As a parent, I hope our children are similarly fed as they continue in the breaking of the bread. Our son's tired head droops after coming to church following a sleepover while our daughter plays with clay on the pew. In the midst of all of it, attention as well as inattention, they are fed. As they grow up, what I want most for them is to remember where to go when they are hungry.

**—Sarah Irwin**

***Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.***

***—“Come, thou long expected Jesus”  
The Hymnal 1982***

When I sing Charles Wesley’s Advent hymn, the theologian in me acknowledges that the “long expectedness” of Jesus is a reference to the generations-long hope for the Messiah and the much longer hope for redemption. As a parent though, I think about our long expectation for our children’s births. All parents undergo this anticipation: Joy mixed with anxiety, hope mixed with fear. Birth mothers obviously experience the wait in innumerable physical ways.

Although it’s an Advent hymn, the long expectedness of Jesus is connected to our Lenten observance. As we acknowledge and repent of our “manifold sins and wickedness,” we acknowledge our need for God’s grace: redemption that comes from God. We may feel some anxiety or fear about our sinfulness, but ultimately both birth and Christ’s redemption of our sin are joyful, hopeful and graceful reminders of God’s love for us.

**— Patrick Funston**

*When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.*

—John 16:21

The spirit of this verse from John is accurate, but I'm not so sure how realistic it is. I have three children, and I can assure you I remember the pain of each birth. I remember the pain of the first childbirth as my time to labor grew near for the second and third. I still remember that pain.

For those of us who have borne children into this world, our bodies will never forget the physical pain of simultaneously giving and receiving the gift of life. But the joy far outweighs the suffering—especially when we acknowledge the magnitude of the blessing we hold.

At a time like this, I think of Mary. I wonder about the pain she felt when she bore Jesus. I wonder how she felt holding the baby, knowing that one day she would feel the pain of losing him. Thanks to Mary, we can all bear our labor pains, knowing that God eternally protects our children.

—Miriam Willard McKenney

***If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.***

**—Deuteronomy 15:7-8**

The city that I live in is undergoing one of the most severe homelessness crises since the Great Depression. Each night, 61,000 people—including 21,000 children—sleep in New York’s shelter system. Every day, I am asked by at least two or three people for a quarter or a dollar so they can go on living.

About a year ago, I began keeping a dollar in my left pant pocket, ready to give away to the first person who asked. It wasn’t long before I realized how profoundly inadequate this was, and so in addition to giving away these dollars, I began giving away bits of time. Today I’m involved with an organization that is advocating for more affordable housing for families being pushed out by New York’s rising rent.

Of course, I know that soon even these little bits of time will not seem like enough. For with each dollar and rally, I am becoming more proximate to people who are struggling. Their stories draw me out; their joys and challenges ask me to reprioritize my everything. Following God, we are asked to give our all.

**—Miguel Escobar**



***Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be served but to serve: Bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of others; that with wisdom, patience, and courage, they may minister in his Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy—for the love of him who laid down his life for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.***

***—The Book of Common Prayer***

My children love their teachers. It's not a fluffy love but a deep, true, real love. I love them too. Their teachers often remind me of the ways my children are wonderful and amazing when the day-to-day weight of parenting breaks me down. Their teachers pour themselves out daily and show up over and over again. They see the big picture while focusing on the little things that make each child successful.

I invite you to join me in praying for those who give themselves to the service of our children. The exhaustion, the low pay, the burnout and the emotional work that goes into such service seems like enough to make no one take it on, yet there they are. Every day, teachers show up in love and with grace to educate, to support and to challenge the beloved children of God.

**— Emily Rutledge**

***Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us to your never-failing care and love, for this life and the life to come, knowing that you are doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

***—The Book of Common Prayer***

I want my children to be safe—protected from risk, pain and suffering. But there is a serious problem with these desires because so much of our development happens in the places where our lives intersect with risk and pain. It is often in those places where we most grow and discover who we are. In one sense, my love for my children wants to protect them, but if I truly love them, I know that I must honor their personhood and allow for struggle in their life.

The truth of the matter is that I have very little control over the risk, pain and suffering my children will encounter in life. But what I can do is entrust them to God's never-failing care and love. God's love, stronger and deeper than mine, is always with them in the places beyond my control, doing for them better things than I can desire or pray for.

**—Jamie Osborne**



**Sunday, March 8**

## **Improving Food And Nutrition**

Episcopal Relief & Development's work supports nutrition counseling during and after pregnancy, promotes exclusive breastfeeding and effective feeding and care practices for families, ensuring families have enhanced access to nutritious foods. Our programs also monitor the growth and development of children over the critical early years and link them with health systems as needed for maximum care.

***Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?***

***—The Book of Common Prayer***

Whenever I prepare someone for baptism, I always point out that the Baptismal Covenant doesn't say *if* you sin. It doesn't even say *when*. It says *whenever*. This brings a specificity to it: Sin is a repeated action. Every single time. Repent, return. Repent, return. Repent, return. There's a line in *Saint Augustine's Prayer Book*, in the prayer for a parent, that echoes this, asking that my child will receive from God "whatever is wanting in me through frailty or negligence." Again: the word is not an "if" but a "whatever." There are no extra credit points with which one can earn a perfect grade. Perfection is not an option. There will be gaps.

The illusion of being a perfect parent is tempting. But, I am not perfect. I cannot fix everything. I will let my children down. I will ask for forgiveness and, in turn, try to forgive. I can't always get it right, but I can always try to love. And if I'm honest about that love, I'll own the fact that it's not even me. It's God's love in me. It's true that I can't fix everything, but in God's providence, everything will be fine.

***—Sarah Irwin***



*Almighty God, giver of life and love, bless these parents. Grant them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. And so knit their wills together in your will and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may live together in love and peace all the days of their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*—The Book of Common Prayer*

This collect “for parents” doesn’t reference children at all. I laugh when I pray it because even when I don’t explicitly say “children,” I know they are present. So much of parenting is need, perplexity, sorrow and joy. We need strength, counsel, comfort and companionship to make it. I commend this prayer for more than just partnered couples; this is a prayer for all those who care for children. Part of our Christian ministry is to support parents in their parenting vocation. How might we support all family configurations in their work of raising up disciples?

**— Patrick Funston**

***Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full.***

***—Proverbs 19:17***

Members of our church prepare and serve meals at Tender Mercies, an agency that provides housing and services for homeless people living with mental health issues. My girls have been participating for quite some time, but I didn't start going until a couple of years ago when I began work as the youth minister. When it is our church's turn to serve the meal, they all want to go. "I love going to Tender Mercies," one youth said. "It's not always easy, but I always feel good."

In the last two years, I've watched the members of our youth group go from quiet and nervous to friendly and talkative with the residents. The more we go, the more the kids want to go. Spending time with our friends at Tender Mercies teaches the kids to respect people, regardless of their circumstances. They now know how to look a homeless person in the eye, smile and say hello. It's not always easy, but it still feels good. They understand that each person they encounter is a gift from God.

**—Miriam Willard McKenney**

*For you yourself created my inmost parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I will thank you because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful, and I know it well.*

—Psalm 139:12-13

It has taken me a long time to consider myself “marvelously made.” I distinctly remember looking at myself in the mirror at twelve or thirteen and seeing none of the psalmist’s soaring language staring back at me. Being gay, I felt only shame and disgust. Yet in God’s good time, I’ve grown closer to God’s joyful truth.

Today, on my way to work, I glanced around the full subway car and saw exhausted immigrant day laborers, pimply high school students, a wealthy Wall Street type wearing a \$100 silk tie and a slumped-over homeless man who smelled strongly of dried urine. Each person was different than the next, yet each was created in the image of God. Did I see all of them as marvelously made? What would it mean to really do so?

—Miguel Escobar



***Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan, plead for the widow.***

***—Isaiah 1:17***

I've always hung my hat on being a champion for social justice. I educate my children on social issues from race to gender to sexuality to gun control. They have Marched for Our Lives and attended Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations. Yet, having small children has opened me up to the amount of times I have been conditioned to look away. The "why" questions innate in children have invited me deeper into the chasm between our broken world and God's kingdom coming closer—and to look at instead of away from. Why is that man sleeping under the overpass? Why did my classmate's father die suddenly? Why does that rainbow fall exactly over our beloved neighbor's house when they are in need of extra joy? Raising children causes us to lean in and look, listen and search for answers when it's easier or when we are too distracted to do so.

Sometimes big-picture justice and mercy can be lofty goals but the daily living of Isaiah 1:17 is kick-started by the small people who are unafraid to look the world in the eyes and ask why.

***—Emily Rutledge***

***In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.***

**—Acts 2:17**

There is much sighing and headshaking when it comes to today's generation of young people. They are often portrayed as lazy, undisciplined and somehow less than those who came before. But it is helpful to step back and realize that older generations have been telling this same story about younger generations from the beginning.

This story isn't doing us any favors. It keeps us from joining God's work in our present day. God works through both the young and old together and invites us into that work in our daily lives. This godly work is almost impossible when the young, through whom Peter says God's Spirit is working, are derided and dismissed. Old and young together, declaring, visioning, dreaming and living out God's love in the world today—together. That's a much better story. It's good news.

**—Jamie Osborne**



**Sunday, March 15**

## **Protecting Health And Preventing Disease**

In many countries around the world, pregnant women, mothers and children are most at-risk of contracting deadly and preventable diseases because they lack access to health care. We train local health workers and community volunteers to focus on prenatal and postnatal care, prevention of pneumonia, malaria and diarrhea (e.g. immunizations and nets), mother-to-child transmission and care for families impacted by HIV/AIDS. Our programs also provide access to clean water, proper sanitation and hygiene education, and help with early identification and treatment of illnesses.

***Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?***

***—The Book of Common Prayer***

Children see *everything*, and if we pay attention, we receive the profound gift of seeing them see. I was most struck by this when my son was around three years old. He was fascinated by a war memorial we drove by on the way to his preschool that featured a large canon. “What is it? Does it still shoot cannonballs? Is it dangerous?” And, finally, one day, “Do wars still happen?”

Yes, I told him. Wars still happen. He was appalled, but I assured him that they were far away and he was safe. “Well, we have to go there and tell them to stop!” At three, my son hadn’t yet maladjusted himself to a world in which we accept war as a fact of life. If people are behaving badly, he reasoned, they should be instructed to stop. Why did it have to be complicated?

To proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ means not just being nice and telling people about Jesus. It means living a gospel that is so good that it doesn’t stop at good enough. My son wasn’t asking about his own safety. He was asking about a moral outrage and demanding answers. Why was I so calm when others were suffering? Yes, why?

***—Sarah Irwin***



*If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.*

**—Isaiah 58:10-11**

As I spend time with my children, I often think about how amazing it is that their births and lives have affected my being so acutely. Much like with my ordination, I can very clearly feel and see a “before” and an “after.” I often wonder if that change was an uncovering of something that was within me all along or if it’s something that was given to me from outside.

In speaking about service, Isaiah offers a type of answer: YES. Acts of service reveal an internal light, but that’s not all. Service allows us to see God’s grace funneled toward us.

**— Patrick Funston**

***And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?"  
In reply, he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must  
share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food  
must do likewise."***

***—Luke 3:10-11***

Have you ever heard of the bag challenge for Lent? Each day during Lent, you fill a bag with items from any area of your home that you no longer need. This daily practice allows kids to practice generosity in a way that can become a natural routine by the end of Lent.

Even in our materialistic, consumer-driven culture, we seek to know Jesus and understand his teachings. Jesus tells us that if we have two coats, we share one. What if we went into our closets and got rid of half of what we had? What if we opened our cabinets and refrigerators and practiced the radical generosity that Jesus preaches? It might mean giving something away that we really like and still want. Often, what we want is what someone else needs.

One morning on the way to school, my daughter Jaiya brought a small bag of clothing. When I asked her who it was for, she said, "There's someone I know who needs these."

**—Miriam Willard McKenney**







***You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.***

**—Leviticus 19:13-14**

This passage is stunning in its specificity. It could simply command us to not take advantage of the poor, but instead it specifically addresses employer abuse, the act of withholding wages from people who are hungry now. It could simply say to not take advantage of others' vulnerabilities, but instead it says to not make fun of those who can't hear what you're saying or trip up those who will never see it coming. Through this specificity, we meet a God who is watchful of how powerful people treat the powerless.

As Americans, we are immersed in a hyper-competitive culture that encourages—even exults in—capitalizing on others' desperation and vulnerability. Yesterday's headlines included a story about drug companies taking advantage of people with rare but fatal diseases. Their individual needs are so great while the population with this disease is so small that companies take advantage and charge exorbitant amounts.

This is not the way of God. I believe we are called to join with God in being watchful of how powerful people treat the powerless.

**—Miguel Escobar**

***Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***

***—Ephesians 5:1-2***

Without fail, on my children's birthdays, family friends arrive at our home with a tower of homemade cards and trinkets. Carefully drawn and colored pictures, Perler beads melted into new shapes, delicately folded origami animals, rainbow loom bracelets in favorite colors. Each created treasure is as unique as its recipient and the relationship shared with its creator. This abundant outpouring of love is so personal and thoughtful.

These friends began creating their gifts with their whole hearts since they were able, though over the past five years the cards have become more ornate and the handmade gifts a bit more complex. Yet the spirit of it remains the same. As I revel in the love poured into these personal, fragrant offerings, it makes me reconsider the meaning of the gifts I send with a click of the button and two-day shipping.

Children are able to imitate God without making it hard. They share art, remember favorite colors and create things that honor the beauty they see in the person they are celebrating. It's holy, and it's simple. And it's so easily forgotten as we grow older.

**—Emily Rutledge**

***Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church.***

***—The Book of Common Prayer***

During seminary, I spent quite a bit of time in the Chapel of the Apostles at The School of Theology in Sewanee. The chapel's stone, wood, metal and glass formed a cathedral of light, transparent to the changes in seasons and time, which in turn formed me through the rhythm of the community that gathered to pray.

But one of the most formative features of the chapel wasn't made of stone, wood, metal or glass; instead, it was a little boy named John Michael. He was born with an infection that left him with major health and developmental issues. He was small for his age. He couldn't stand or talk or feed himself. Sometimes he would moan or cough, but it was more than apparent that John Michael loved being in the chapel. He was often there with his seminarian father who held him in one hand and *The Book of Common Prayer* in the other. He showed me what the Body of Christ looks like—every baptized person no matter their age or development, who, when gathered together, form Christ's Body. Full members. Every one of us.

**—Jamie Osborne**





**Sunday, March 22**

## **Empowering Parents**

Education about early stimulation and growth and development is critical for children to reach their full potential. Using a holistic and integrated approach, we focus on teaching parents and caregivers skills and activities that involve play, nurturing and stimulation through home visits and family support networks. Episcopal Relief & Development programs support early care and education and can help children transition to quality preschools and primary school.



*Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?*

*—The Book of Common Prayer*

Sometimes it can be hard to find Christ in others. Sometimes it can be hard to find Christ in yourself too. One of the most humbling experiences of parenthood is the absolute, bottomless love that children can offer. Unconcerned about how your career is going or whether you served broccoli as the vegetable for dinner three nights in a row (or if you missed the vegetable entirely), children just don't care. They love.

I had never much connected with parental images for God until I had children. "Father" was too distant and patriarchal, and "God our Mother" seemed like a reactionary knock-off that tried to reverse a gendered binary. Responding in love to the love of my children, though, puts me in the place of both lover and beloved. I can repeat day after day that I don't earn God's love, but secretly I am sure that good behavior is required. Would I demand that of my children to love them? Of course not. Do they require it of me for love? No.

God's love is there, waiting. Sometimes it's easy to see, other times less so. But Christ is in me and in you. Let us open our eyes.

**—Sarah Irwin**

***Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you.***

***—Isaiah 42:5-6***

When my four-year-old gets out of the car, she immediately bolts. Her dash is usually anticipated by the common parental refrain, “Hold my hand, please!” She rarely wants to hold my hand. In this way, parking lots are spiritual exercises for our family. I’m aware of the dangerous realities they bring. She doesn’t care. My depth of knowledge, my fear for her well-being is manifested in a hand hold.

Typically, when I hear the language of God holding our hands, I’m reassured by the image. It’s an image I receive as one where God’s outstretched hand is always available for me when I know I need it. But my parental parking lot fear makes me notice that Isaiah wants to convey a different thing. I’m not the best judge of my need for God’s protection; I cannot be relied upon to know what’s best for me. In the parking lot of my life, sometimes God has to grab me, to save me from my independence.

**— Patrick Funston**

*Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving spirit may so move every human heart and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*—The Book of Common Prayer*

My three daughters and I frequently talk about how to navigate life as black girls and women. One thing we talk about is the fact that people think we shouldn't have to talk about profiling, bias, racism and praying for those who wish us harm. When the girls were younger, people often questioned whether my husband was their father. He's very dark-skinned; the girls have different skin tones that are considerably lighter than his.

Nia, my eldest, commented that in the past, people would stare and not say anything. The question stayed on their faces, unlike now. Nia paid attention to the fact that it made her upset, but as a child, she didn't have the mindset to look past her feelings toward a solution. She gave everyone the benefit of the doubt, deserved or not.

My friend Rachel loves to remind me that we are an Easter people. We turn and turn and turn again to the risen Christ for forgiveness and redemption. The only way we will ever be able to stop praying this prayer for social justice is to have difficult, honest conversations with each other whenever we can. What can you do this Lent to invite the Spirit into your heart? What barriers are you willing to cross?

**—Miriam Willard McKenney**

***At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."***

**—Matthew 18:1-3**

My husband has taught nine and ten-year-olds for twelve years. Hearing story after story about kids in his classroom has shaped how I understand Jesus saying we need to cast aside our notions of greatness and become "like children."

For ages nine and ten, we're talking uncontrollable rambunctiousness and uninhibited dancing—and necessary recess to get all the extra energy out. This tender age is when a quiet kid may start to come out of their shell or a happy child goes silent, weighed down by an adult world they don't understand or have control over. There's also a lot of sass, though frequently it's expressed in incredibly funny ways. But perhaps most importantly, this is an age when children are on the cusp of their own great transformations.

Jesus skewers our adult versions of greatness. Fancy job titles? Multiple degrees? How dull. Better, he says, to be like a nine-year-old: funny, rambunctious, still tender and with way too much energy. Far better to stay an uninhibited singer, someone who struggles to line up quietly in the hallway and on the cusp of transformation.

**—Miguel Escobar**

***Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.***

***—Philippians 2:4***

The youth community at my parish came up with a saying years ago: No one sits alone. It's become a mantra that informs everything we do. It has made sitting down for a meal an act of worship. It means high school seniors join the new sixth grader sitting alone at a table and begin conversation. It means that no matter what happened during rest of the day, when you show up at church you are going to be seen. This mantra means that everyone is tasked with focusing on others.

When Jesus calls his disciples, he asks them to leave the comfort of the lives they knew for something more. When a teenager leaves the comfort of their friend group to invite another in or go join them where they are, it is that same discipleship. It is following Christ. I think sometimes we make this following Jesus thing more complicated than it needs to be. Sit with someone who is alone. Include. Open the circle. Make room. Small acts of love can radically change the life of someone else.

**—Emily Rutledge**



***Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!***

**—Psalm 95:7b**

Many of us are familiar with the term *lectio divina* which means holy reading. It is a spiritual practice of listening deeply to God, usually through meditation on a biblical text; however, we hinder our listening if we limit it only to the written words of scripture.

One day, my children and I were talking about God when my eight-year-old son said, “Dad, people have seen God in rays of light.” I’m sure he did not mean it as profoundly as it hit me, but it stayed with me, like a little note, folded up and put into my pocket, walking around with me wherever I went.

It reminded me of something Thomas Merton wrote concerning his revelation of union with all of humanity, as he stood on the corner of Fourth and Walnut streets in Louisville, Kentucky. He saw people as they really were, in all of their luminous God-given glory, each person “walking around shining like the sun.”

It could have been easy to miss, but in a passing phrase, the unassuming voice of my young son helped me hear what God was saying. “People have seen God in rays of light.” And God shines in my son. In me. And in everyone I see, walking around shining like the sun.

**—Jamie Osborne**





**Sunday, March 29**

## **Creating Economic Stability**

A family's access to financial resources and education has a direct impact on a child's development and their performance in school. Episcopal Relief & Development programs create economic opportunities and strengthen communities to help parents and caregivers earn an income. We help ensure that families can provide food, health care and education for their children. This work includes supporting Savings with Education (SwE) groups, providing financial and business training, providing loans to individuals and groups for small businesses and developing micro-insurance products, village banks and cooperatives for people without access to traditional financial markets and institutions.



**Monday, March 30**

***Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,  
and respect the dignity of every human being?***

***—The Book of Common Prayer***

After the first day of school, my daughter informed me that she was in the “good class.” I asked what she meant by “good.” “Oh,” she replied. “Just that, like, the kids who don’t behave are in the other room.” I was glad she was in the well-behaved class but not so sure about that easy condemnation. I responded with the suggestion: “How about saying the class with ‘better-behaved kids.’ It’s not like you have better-quality human beings than the other classes.” I don’t know if she heard the difference in what I was saying, but it was worth a shot. I wanted her to hear that behavior doesn’t determine worthiness-of-life and that there are no limits on human dignity.

To respect the dignity of every human being is not to say that everyone is okay and that we’re all basically good. It means recognizing that we are all both broken and beloved and that nobody ever gets thrown away. Particularly in the season of Lent, we are invited to look inward and see our own quixotic impulses: We may be generous one day and selfish another, willfully ignorant on one question but adventurous and curious on another. God never gives up on us. May we have the courage and strength not to give up on each other either.

**—Sarah Irwin**

***Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”***

***—Deuteronomy 15:11***

I think I freaked out my daughter’s preschool teacher at our last conference. As we discussed goals, I wasn’t concerned about my child meeting some academic milestone, how well she knew her ABCs or whether she was becoming a better reader. I told her teacher that what I was hoping for my children was an invitation to develop their emotional intelligence. When we drop off in the mornings, we always look around to see whether someone needs a friend—and in preschool, there’s always somebody who’s having a hard morning! Some of my proudest parental moments have been when my daughter notices a friend in need before I say a word.

As adults, we sometimes harden ourselves to need by labeling it as systemic and therefore out of our control. We allow the generality to distance us, but Moses’ invitation is personal: It’s not “fight the system” but rather “open your hand.” It’s an invitation to enter into preschool and notice who needs a friend.

**— Patrick Funston**

*Taste and see, taste and see the goodness of the Lord.  
Oh, taste and see, taste and see the goodness of the  
Lord, of the Lord.*

*—“Taste and See”*

I remember singing “Taste and See” during communion on many a Sunday growing up. I didn’t know the song used Psalm 34 for its lyrics, but that didn’t matter. What mattered was that this song gave me a language to use when people asked me about my church or my faith. Kids who knew my dad was a priest would ask what was so great about going to church. I didn’t know how to put it into my own words. “Taste and see,” I told them. “Come, taste and see.”

The truth is, evangelizing is hard for some of us. One Sunday in youth group, I asked the teenagers gathered how they shared the good news about Jesus. One said that she prays with a group of dancers before a performance. Another said that he attends a Catholic school where many kids are religious. A couple of kids wear outward signs of faith: One wears a crucifix, another loves church camp gear. As a self-professed group of introverts, they are finding their own ways to show their love for Jesus in this secular world. They remind me to continue inviting others to taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

**—Miriam Willard McKenney**

***Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan, plead for the widow.***

—Isaiah 1:17

The first four words of this verse are simple: “Learn to do good.” I have found that this is a lot easier to say than it is to carry out.

In my life, I frequently find myself reading an article about a terrible injustice and then *desiring* to do good. When I went to seminary, I spent a lot of time *thinking* about what it means to do good. Because of my work, I’m oftentimes writing reflections on the importance of doing good. I’ve heard many sermons about doing good, have sung hymns about doing good and have been dismissed with a resounding call to “do good.” I’ve voted for people who I think will do good and, like many, I’ve posted a lot on social media about what I think it means to “do good.”

Nevertheless, as nice as all these things are, they are not enough. God insists that at some point we actually have to walk the talk and go do it. To my mind, the rest of this verse specifies what that means: to seek justice where there is none to be found, to rescue people who have no chance, to defend the welfare of children who have no one and to plead the case for marginalized women in society. Reflecting honestly, have you done any of these things lately?

—Miguel Escobar



***This is my story, this is my song, praising my savior, all the day long.***

**—“Blessed Assurance”  
Lift Every Voice and Sing II**

I am a worrier by nature. I spend so much energy thinking of what could be or what may be that I often forget to just be. My children have the wonderful gift of not worrying too much about what’s next because they are caught up in what is now. The gift that children give us by living in the now is holy and transformative.

There are days when my children spend hours catching frogs and losing their shoes in mud pits. There are days when they forget food is even a part of life because they are experiencing such joy. This past summer a short hike turned into five hours at a swimming hole in the Blue Ridge Mountains. These moments of love and curiosity are worship. They are the ways my children find God. They are the experiences that make their story and mold them. I am often afraid that my story, my song, is one of fear and worry, but my children are teaching me that I could be writing a story and singing a song of joyful praise, experiencing God’s kingdom in all its glory.

**— Emily Rutledge**

*It may sound strange to speak of the relationship between parents and children in terms of hospitality. But it belongs to the center of the Christian message that children are not properties to own and rule, but gifts to cherish and care for. Our children are our most important guests, who enter into our home, ask for careful attention, stay for a while and then leave to follow their own way.*

**—Henri Nouwen  
Reaching Out**

Henri Nouwen's words about hospitality to children have impacted my understanding of the role of being an adult in relation to children. Children are not possessions—they are persons. They come to us as children for only a short while on their way to becoming adults who will then "leave to follow their own way."

In the fifty-third chapter of the Rule of Saint Benedict, we are told that "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ." We are to seek and serve Christ in all persons, especially the guests who stay with us for a while on their journey. Nouwen reminds us that this hospitality should extend too to the children who present themselves to our families, churches and communities—each one an important guest, with us for a short while before leaving on their own way.

**—Jamie Osborne**



**Sunday, April 5**

## **Protecting Families**

Social protection lessens the effects of poverty on families, strengthening their ability to care for children and enhancing access to basic services. Our programs focus on underserved groups and communities by offering counseling and other services to prevent domestic and child abuse, ensure parents have adequate child care, train faith leaders to help put an end to violence and support people in crisis situations.



***Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation? \****

God created, and, indeed, it was very good.

My family has gone backpacking every summer since our daughter was four years old. This time together immersed in creation—even amidst the moans of blisters and heavy bags and who-got-the-last-packet-of-lemonade bickering—is one of my favorite times of the whole year. Being in the wilderness with nothing to plug in or answer brings us to our essential selves and reminds us of who we are together.

Creation, of course, is all around us, no less in rivers and mountains than the dandelions creeping up between gaps in the sidewalk. Being a person of faith is about learning to see God everywhere; the life force of a weed is as fearsome as the tallest mountain. To cherish God's wondrous works and protect its beauty and creation is a twenty-four-hour-a-day proposition. It's more complicated than just packing our trash in and out on a long hike; we are in a crisis of our own making, and time is short. True creation stewardship means being committed at every level, from how we shop to how we vote. Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation? I will. With God's help.

**—Sarah Irwin**

\*This sixth baptismal promise was authorized for trial use at the 78<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

***I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.***

**—Hosea 11:4**

There's not much I love more in this world than holding one of my children—except when I absolutely do not want to do it. My kids have a knack for asking me to hold them at exactly the moment I'm working at a hot stove, busy with a task or just exhausted from the day.

In my reflective maturity, I realize that to parent young children is to constantly be invited to the spiritual practice of presence. I know that, no matter how much I work out, I am not going to be able to physically hold my children for much longer. Apart from that, they aren't going to *want* me to hold them much longer. Practicing presence invites me to give thanks for who they are now and reminds me that there is no task more important than the cords of human kindness and bands of love.

**— Patrick Funston**

*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*

When my daughter Nia was fourteen, she got home three hours before anyone else. One evening, she revealed, “I don’t like being home by myself after school.” I was stunned! When I was her age, I loved being home by myself. Ultimately, I quit my full-time job, and we changed our lifestyle so that none of the girls spent long afternoons alone.

This prayer names the struggles we watch our young people walk through. In a world where the ground can be shaky, our youth need prayer and honest conversations about a life of faith. Pray this prayer for the young people known to you and those unknown. Do you notice a difference in them? Do you see a difference in yourself?

**—Miriam Willard McKenney**

***After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them..."I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."***

**—John 13:12a, 15**

Last year a mother and her two children wandered into our church just as the altar guild began clearing away items used during the foot washing ceremony. From the celebrant's chair, I watched the altar guild quietly return a pitcher and basin as another member greeted our guests and invited them to participate. The daughter let go of her mother's hand, removed her sandals and gingerly walked forward. My own daughter then rose from her acolyte chair beside me, knelt down in front of the visiting child and washed her feet.

The act of washing a stranger's feet surely offers an example for us to follow, but that's not what brought tears to my eyes. It was instead watching my yellow-haired, pale-skinned daughter tenderly wash the feet of a child her age with meticulously braided hair and dark-brown skin. It was a profoundly holy moment. Families of color never wandered into the church of my childhood, but if they had, I am certain no one would have voluntarily knelt down to wash their feet. In that moment I was reminded how often our children with their unblemished points of view set Christ-like examples for us follow.

**— Allison Sandlin Liles**

*O sorrow deep! Who would not weep with heartfelt pain  
and sighing!*

*—“O sorrow deep”  
The Hymnal 1982*

About a year ago I met a Syrian refugee in Jordan whom I will call Fatimah. Fatimah fled Syria four years ago. Her husband was killed in the civil war along with two of her children, leaving her with three remaining children.

She told me that every day is a struggle. She cannot return to Syria, and she cannot leave the refugee camp. As Fatimah spoke, anger overtook her. She turned to me and, shaking with fury, shouted: “I have no future. I have no hope.”

It’s not often that I come away from an Episcopal Relief & Development program visit feeling discouraged. And yet, the sad reality is that sometimes we can’t change the circumstances in which people have to live and die.

We can’t bring back Fatimah’s husband and two dead children. We can’t restore her to her former life in Syria. But what we can do is bear witness to Fatimah’s suffering. We can give Fatimah the dignity of being present and sharing her pain. We can ensure that Fatimah is not forgotten.

Good Friday is about bearing witness to Jesus’ crucifixion, just as we need to bear witness to Fatimah’s suffering. We stand at the foot of the cross, helpless and sometimes hopeless. But we are there, and today that is the most important thing we can do.

**—Rob Radtke**

***Almighty God, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them up.***

**—The Book of Common Prayer**

The scene was familiar. I had been traveling to Ghana regularly to support the Anglican Diocesan Development & Relief Organization as they implemented maternal and child health programs. When I attended community gatherings, I often noticed that when children became fussy or disruptive, parents might impatiently shush them, whisper sternly to behave or wave them away to restore calm. After all, the adults were talking. We've all been there, right?

This time was different. I had come to see the progress of the newly implemented *Moments That Matter* early childhood development and parenting empowerment program. In addition to sharing health messages, we also promote parenting practices focusing on attentive and nurturing care. Within a few months of introducing the program, parents began making eye contact with their crying children, comforting and soothing them. Rather than shooing away gregarious toddlers, parents instead played *with* them. The attention was on the children, and the children responded positively. This shift in dynamic was notable, powerful and quick.

I am elated and humbled by the power and potential of our work with parents and children. It gives me real hope that we can all follow the example of Jesus to create a loving, nurturing world for all of God's children.

**—Melissa Crutchfield**









***Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples,  
“I have seen the Lord.”***

***—John 20:18***

In speaking those five words—“I have seen the Lord”—Mary Magdalene became the very first person to proclaim resurrection. God chose a woman to offer this holy announcement and to point the way toward hope and new life in Christ.

Last year, I visited Zambia to see firsthand the remarkable difference that Episcopal Relief & Development and its partners are making in the lives of children and their families. While there, we were invited to observe a meeting of a Savings and Education group. Members contribute to a communal cash box each week. They can ask for loans at any point, and at the end of the term, they split the proceeds evenly. Members told us that the group has provided a sense of empowerment and increased financial security for themselves and the children in their care.

As these women counted their current savings out loud in unison, it struck me that each number they announced was a proclamation of hope. These women, like Mary before them, are proclaiming resurrection. They are pointing the way toward hope and new life in Christ—toward a better future for their communities. I am proud to support this Easter work.

**—Gay Clark Jennings**

# ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE

## MY LENTEN RESPONSE

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

Episcopal Relief & Development facilitates healthier, more fulfilling lives in communities courageously addressing hunger, poverty, disease and disaster, as well as the care and nurture of children. I want to join in partnership with churches, communities and friends to make a difference in the lives of children and their families worldwide.

I would like to join with Episcopal Relief & Development in ONE THOUSAND DAYS OF LOVE, through an act of love to bring lasting change for children, their families, communities and our world. Enclosed is my Lenten offering to help children and communities thrive.

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